

Ernie Hoffman

With his father most affectionately



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—Railways, postages—in a word, all the numerous facilities of the age—have almost annihilated distance, and, as a natural result, caused an individual trade between country customers and London establishments. Those who do not visit town, so as to select and purchase directly, send for patterns from which they can give their orders. But as all apparent advantages on the one hand have more or less their corresponding drawbacks, so this system is not without its bane. Pushing tradesmen make a market by offering goods at lower rates than they can possibly be sold at to realise a fair profit. The bait traps the unreflective, and the result is that the receipts *en masse* are not equal to the tempting samples. There is no new invention in this; it has been practised in wholesale merchandise and by candidates for contracts, as the proverb hath it, since there were hills and valleys. But we grieve to add it is sometimes resorted to by those whom one would credit for more integrity. Ladies, therefore, need exercise caution, and place confidence only in houses of old-established fame, for rapidly-made businesses are not generally reliable. And to what does this assertion amount more than to the fact that nothing great can be effected not only without labour but without time, and that Rome was not built, as the old saying says, in a day? Messrs. Jay, of Regent-street, whose name is well known amongst the few on the list of *bonâ fide* establishments in the metropolis, are about to adopt a plan (which will be registered) for assisting country ladies in choosing for themselves London fashions and fabrics. And their customers may rest assured that they will thus be enabled to obtain goods of every quality, both low and high priced, at the most reasonable terms—that is, the terms of small profits for quick returns—and that they may firmly rely upon the thoroughly corresponding character of samples and supplies.—From the *Court Journal*, April 27, 1867.

OLD TIMES REVIVED.

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

FRANK TROLLOPE,

Author of "An Old Man's Secret," "Broken Fetters," &c., &c.

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CHAPTER I.

MANY centuries ago stood, near the borders of a wide and exceedingly deep lake, a large and massive castle. We will endeavour to describe this castle, for Italy boasted few like it.

The walls of this stronghold were both high and thick, and topped by strong battlements. The towers thereof were round and exceedingly massive, and the keep was unusually tall and square. Any one looking

from its formidable lofty battlements would have appeared to those on the ground beneath but as a child. The court-yards were of considerable extent and better paved than most of the castles of the period. The entrance, or great gate as it was called, was high and arched, its portcullis massive and of great strength.

This castle contained numerous rooms, of all sizes and dimensions, from the lofty hall to the small turret chamber. It had numerous loop-holes cut in the form of a cross, a draw-bridge, in fact everything requisite to make it, what it in truth was, a magnificent specimen of the feudal times.

The lake was in every way a fitting adjunct to such a building; the water which was deep and clear, was edged in by mountains on three sides, on the fourth by the castle itself. Of

course the sky, over both lake and castle, was Italian, and all the scenery of the country was vivid, and the atmosphere clear, very unlike the atmosphere of England; the edifice, unlike our English castles, retained its whiteness, and being unstained by damp and fogs, might be seen from a long distance.

Days and nights, months and years, nay centuries, had passed over this noble pile since it was first built; and owner after owner had also passed away; some had died peacefully in the bosom of their family; some had ended their lives violently, and some gently. Some had been mourned for with heart and soul, others had been neither respected during their lives nor regretted after death. The castle had seen both fighting and carousing, and days and nights, and months and years, were still to pass over it, till it should become an

old ruin—an object of curiosity and admiration to tourists, and nothing more.

The days, the evenings, and the nights passed on, till one evening arrived when were to be seen a large number of people assembled in the castle; some were lounging about the courts, as though waiting; some were entering the keep with busy air; whilst others were sitting mute in the various chambers; but one and all were dressed in the deepest mourning garb. The entrance hall was hung with black and lighted with innumerable tapers, which struggled with the crimson light of the evening. The hall was lined with armed men, all having their vizors closed and holding maces reversed. They looked like so many statues, and a spectator would have started if one among them should have moved.

On a bier, in the midst of those armed and silent men, lay the mortal remains of the lord of the castle, attired in the richest dress selected from all the rich ones he had owned. By his side lay his sword, shining with gems; his cold white hands were crossed upon his breast. His face, calm and rigid, looked more like marble than flesh, and his long beard and scanty locks were not more white.

There was nothing revolting in this look of death; on the contrary, on the rigid face, patience, mildness, firmness, and a trace of suffering were stamped. There was no visible indication of the cause of decease, but a long deep wound on his loins was hidden beneath the gorgeous dress, which wound had been inflicted by a fierce boar—the brute, unhurt, still rambled in the forest.

At the head of the bier sat a priest in his

robes of black and silver, whilst others in white surplices surrounded it, and behind them were ranged a dozen knights, who were to act as mourners. At the foot stood his esquires, bearing his sword, shield, helmet, and other arms.

The flickering tapers cast a strange, garish light upon the corpse. There was profound silence in the hall, except when one of the men by a slight movement caused his arms to rattle.

Presently the sound of trumpets was heard without, followed by the roll of muffled drums. The priests then commenced chanting a psalm, and walking round the bier, whilst a party of men, all fully armed, marched slowly into the hall followed by a long line of priests, monks and choristers, who nearly filled it, capacious as it was ; the

monks, priests, and choristers joining in the chant, whilst the men who had preceded them raised the bier and bore it forth.

The esquires marched on either side of the bier, the twelve knights followed. Then came the dead man's horse, a fiery white charger, in mourning trappings, led by two pages who were scarcely able to rein him in. After these walked the priests, monks and choristers, carrying crosses and numerous banners, and chanting forth a mournful dirge. These latter were surrounded by knights, men-at-arms, esquires, all on foot, relieving from time to time the chant of the choristers by the sounds of trumpets, and the funereal roll of the muffled drums.

The castle gate was opened wide. The procession issued from the long dark gateway, wound down a steep road, and then

along a valley towards the neighbouring monastery, in whose chapel reposed the remains of the dead former masters of the castle.

The evening sun shone brightly on the pale face and white hair of the corpse, whilst the gems on his sword, his chain and all his trappings sparkled as brilliantly as though he was bearing them to some festival instead of to the grave.

The knight knew not how he was decorated ; he was equally oblivious of the crowd of priests and soldiers who escorted him to his last resting place on earth ; he could not see the country men and women and their young ones kneel as he passed, and look on him with their sparkling eyes, and then rise and falling into the rear, follow the *cortége* on its mournful way. He did not hear the bell tolling sadly as he was carried towards the

church of the monastery, neither had he felt the tears which fell upon him from the darkest, the most lovely eyes of Italy; or the agonized kisses of two trembling lips, which were not to be matched through the length and breadth of the country. He had parted from them forever, and left their owner to mourn in solitude without hope of comfort, excepting that of rejoining him in Heaven.

It was but the morning before that the knight had ridden forth, in the enjoyment of health and vigour, down that same valley, and the friends who then rode with him were vigorous still. The horns sounded, the hounds ran forth, as they hied to the thick forest and hunted many a wild beast of prey. The evening of that day his distressed and sorrowing friends and retainers slowly carried the lord of the castle through the valley again.

His horse followed, wounded and bleeding. The hunted prey had been left neglected in the forest.

The wounded man groaned as though he would fain have repressed his groans, and yet was unable to do so. Drops, caused by intense pain, coursed down his quivering face; his clothes were saturated with the flowing blood. The huntsmen were silent, but the unconscious hounds gambolled to and fro, barking gaily and sharply, whilst the jaded horses were glad to be led at a very slow pace.

The knight raised his eyes and looked wistfully on his castle walls and towers, but spoke no word.

“If I could but see her once again!” thought the wounded man.

“You are suffering much pain,” said

one of his friends. "Shall I order the bearers to rest awhile?"

"No," murmured the knight. "Do not heed my pain. Get back to the castle as speedily as possible."

The men obeyed, and in silence quickened their pace.

After a few minutes, a loud deep groan from the wounded knight caused the bearers to stop. They put down the green and leafy litter on which they carried him. All the huutsmen pressed forward, and all their Italian vehemence burst forth in tears, in gestures, and wild exclamations, when they looked on him.

Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, the loving husband; the friend of some; the master of the rest; a true, brave English knight was lying dead before them.

Some vowed vengeance on the murderous beast that had gored him, and swore they would hunt the forest through and slay him ; one threw himself, weeping, on the still warm body ; others seized his hands and covered them with kisses ; tears were plentifully shed by all, and night began to set in before they re-commenced bearing their friend to his masterless home, and to his widow, unconscious as yet that he whom she had loved so devotedly was numbered with the dead.

And now he was again carried through the valley from the castle, where the dust, the blood, the signs of toil and wounds were removed. The hunter's garb had been replaced by one of velvet and gold ; the face which had been seen full of pain and agony and anxiety, was now calm and still ; the white lips uttered no groans ; the brow, which a

short time since had been knit with pain, was now smooth. The rolling eyes were closed; Sir Thomas Fitzgerald's life was over.

The mournful procession drew near the church, and the sound of the deep toned bell was borne, loud and at intervals, through the clear, still air. The body was carried to the choir and placed in the middle before the altar. The twelve knights, who were the mourners, knelt round it. The esquires placed the dead man's arms on the altar amidst the roll of the drums and the pealing forth of the organ. Mass was then sung; the odour of the incense filling every part of the church.

The stained glass windows, in the deep rich glowing colours of days gone by, shut out the fading light of the sky. The lamps and tapers shone red in the choir, leaving the rest of the building to the murky gloom, lighting the

mailed and plated men who lined the choir, but not giving to view the kneeling multitude in the body of the church.

Between the pauses of the choir, the feeble voice of the old and trembling priest chaunted the prayers, sounding hoarsely and almost supernaturally, and anon the priests, the monks and the choristers filled the church with their numerous voices, some deep and manly and full—voices that should have been sounded in war and in command—others cold and sad as a monkish life, passionless and weak, mingling with the clear young voices of the boys. Two priests in black and silver paced to and fro, whilst the black plumes of the knights waved gloomily in the sepulchral light of the tapers.

The mass ended, the trumpets again sounded, accompanied by the roll of the muffled drums.

The knights who mourned knelt before the altar, whilst the other assistants marched round the body, each kissing the clay cold cheek as he passed, and in this order filed from the choir.

The twelve knights then took their last farewell of their friend, the crowd dispersed, and the remains of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald lay alone by the uncertain light of the four tapers that burnt around him.

CHAPTER II.

SIR THOMAS FITZGERALD'S inconsolable widow wept alone and sleepless. His vehemently agitated Italian friends all slept soundly and so forgot their woes. The peasants too were calmly resting on their hard beds; all nature was quiet; the priests, the monks, and the choristers reposed softly, and the good English knight slept more peacefully than all.

A small side door opened, and six monks entered the church, two bearing lights, the

rest a leaden coffin. Their shoeless feet gave forth no sound. They reached the choir and approached the body. All was done in profound silence. The English knight was removed from the bier and laid in the coffin.

“Sir Thomas was as brave as he was powerful,” whispered one of the monks who had been a soldier in former days, taking the stiffened right hand of the dead and examining it. The hand which had done good service in its time, which had wielded lance and sword and battleaxe; a hand which had never grasped lance, sword, or battle axe save in the cause of honor and of kindness, and was ever ready to do battle for oppressed innocence. The hand which had pressed with love the whitest, softest hand in Italy fell heavily as the monk, with a deep sigh, released his hold.

The other monks spoke not a word. They composed the limbs of the dead knight in his narrow bed, and then consigned him to darkness for ever. They bore him without the church. The stars were shining brilliantly; moon there was none. In perfect silence they carried their burthen towards two flaming torches which were stuck in the ground, giving light to a yawning grave.

Two monks were silently watching by the side of the grave into which the coffin was lowered, and the mortal remains of the worthy Englishman consigned to foreign earth. Foreign earth was piled upon him, but he slept none the less quietly for that.

The monks, after having performed the last sad duty, left Sir Thomas to his silent home, and re-entered the church, removed the bier and its embroidered pall, extinguished the

tall tapers, and returned to their respective dusky cells in the monastery.

In time arose a splendid monument to the memory of the valiant English knight. The snow-white marble, sculptured in all the rich intricacy of Gothic carving, stood out boldly against the dark blue sky. The light, elegant pinnacles received the scorching sunbeams—the pale rays of the moon—and told to generation after generation that Sir Thomas Fitzgerald and his beloved wife slept within that tomb.

Time, which unrelentingly pursues its course, went on, and generation after generation passed away until great changes came over Italy.

Time defaced the marble tomb, but it was the ruthless hand of man that destroyed it. A party of French soldiers, or rather Repub-

licans, were bivouacked in the church where mass for the repose of the soul of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald had been sung. They drank their wine, they sang their ribald songs, smoked their short pipes in that old church, and after a time strolled forth and gazed on the marble tomb, longed to see its inmates and pillage the treasure they swore was hidden within it. No sooner was the wish expressed than one of the party was despatched for a quantity of gunpowder, and on his return they made short work of the destruction of the tomb. The carving that had cost so much time in execution, so delicately and so patiently had it been sculptured, was, with a loud explosion, blown to pieces accompanied by the noisy oaths and vociferous acclamations of the soldiers.

Half a dozen sappers soon laid bare the

coffin of the English knight, which was ruthlessly dragged forth, as well as another that rested beside it. The light of Heaven again shone on Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, but how changed was he! Yellow bones, a few hairs of his beard, a few rags were there. The gemmed sword was rusty, the chain and jewels all tarnished, but they were so many prizes for which the Republican soldiers gambled with eagerness. The bones were left to fall to dust, and kicked and thrown about by the merry, thoughtless, roistering soldiers.

The English knight's lady, what was she? A skeleton! Rings lay in her coffin which had dropped one by one from her fleshless finger bones. Chains too, and a diamond cross, and these were lost and won by the soldiers of France. Some of these treasures

were carried home by their new owners, some were lost, some sold, and the sword was bought of the winner thereof by an infantry officer, and helped to deck his barrack room for many a long year.

We will now recount some passages in the life of Sir Thomas Fitzgerald, and tell how he came to perish, and his bones to be laid in a foreign land, instead of resting in his native country.

CHAPTER III.

SIR THOMAS FITZGERALD was the son of one Sir James Fitzgerald, a valiant knight—a knight, too, who had seen hard service in battles and skirmishes. Sir James's prowess and valour, joined to a good conscience and a strong body, were nearly all the worldly goods he possessed, for he was "poor as a church mouse."

He married when very young, and his wife was as young as himself; very delicate and

very fair, and Sir James carried her home to the only worldly possession he owned, and this was an exceedingly strong tower, which was situated in a bleak and desolate region, a defile among downs, where the sun scorched up all vegetation in summer, and the cutting winter winds and piercing frosts played tyrannically in their season.

From this strong tower no other habitation was to be seen; nothing but the undulating downs stretching on every side, covered with their coats of fine turf and thyme. There the healthy breeze was felt, adding fresh vigour to the lord of the Tower's vigorous frame, and painting his cheeks with ruddy health. His small flock, too, there cropped the short grass, and his fleet charger bore him rapidly over the smooth and hollow-sounding turf.

His garrison, in consequence of his poverty,

consisted only of half-a-dozen men-at-arms. Their dresses were strong, but homely, and Sir James's was very little superior to those of his followers; his suit of armour shewed his strength, as much as its resplendent polish denoted care, whilst its simplicity and lack of ornament were suggestive of the limited means of its wearer.

The valiant knight's lady, too, was simply clothed; she wore neither embroidered satins nor velvets; neither was she decorated with gold and precious gems, for she could not afford them. A silver cross and her wedding-ring were her only ornaments. A dark dress of good English cloth was well fitted to her small, slender figure, adding, by its contrast, additional bloom to her delicate, fair complexion.

The tall, powerful-limbed knight adored

his amiable and lovely little wife, and he was equally beloved by her ; and whether the sun was scorching, the wind howling, or the breeze merrily blowing, their days passed happily and pleasantly in their Tower on the dark green downs.

In course of time a little babe made its appearance in their strong abode, but the poor, tiny little thing only just opened its eyes and gazed for a few hours about it in pain and crying, when death ruthlessly seized it, and left its mother to lament in silence that the son she had, with such happy pride, given to her husband should be taken so speedily from them.

Time went on, heedless of the knight's regrets, and the wife's sorrowing, and after awhile happy days were once more theirs, and the days and hours passed without alloy.

Once again, when the summer sun was shining on the short green turf, and the sky was without a cloud,—no, not even the slightest scudding white transparent cloud,—a second babe arrived in the strong Tower. Its mother hardly dared to hope for its life, it was so tiny, so delicate, so fragile. But the little babe was not so scantily supplied with life as its brother had been, and Lady Fitzgerald began to look forward to very happy visions of years to be passed with her little daughter. Sir James, too, loved the tiny child and nursed and fondled it in his muscular arms; kissed it with his ruddy mouth, and scrubbed its smooth cheeks with his black and curly beard.

Alas! scarcely had twelve months passed by in their happy home when the parents mourned over their beloved daughter. Its large and lustrous black eyes were closed, the

dark red of the cheek turned ashy white, and its delicately chiselled features were pinched by death !

Great was the sorrow, great was the mourning of the unhappy young mother. Day after day she shed torrents of tears, and it was long ere the wonted smiles on her face returned. However, smiles did return, and Sir James was delighted thereat, but the smiles were not like the bright smiles of former days—in truth they were very sad and very melancholy smiles.

Once again another child was looked for, but Lady Fitzgerald feared to feel joyful, indeed dreaded even to think of her unborn babe. Sadness took firm hold of her, and at times when she sat alone, during the tempestuous, bleak, wintry days, when her lord had ridden forth, a cold chill crept over her heart,

and tears, in spite of all her efforts to repress them, rolled down her cheeks, whilst she dreaded the idea that constantly haunted her, that her child would be born only to die, as the others had.

Sir James, rough as he was, saw her sadness through all her attempts to conceal it. In his kind, though awkward way, he tried to cheer her. She felt, and was grateful, for the endeavour, but it was of no avail.

The Knight sat alone in his dark, dull Tower hall, the fire alone lighted the arched stone roof. A heavy snow had fallen, and lay thick on all without, and the boisterous wind seemed to rush like a battering-ram against the sturdy Tower, whistled in the battlements, and roared round the gaping chimney. He took little heed of the blustering wind; nor, by his pleased look, did he care for the pierc-

ing cold. Sir James was much more engrossed by that which was going on within the Tower than he was by the whistling wind and the wintry cold without. He looked frequently and anxiously towards a door, which was nearly opposite to him, as if he were expecting someone to enter the room by means thereof. Again he appeared to resume his thoughts.

He sat absorbed in his mental reflections a considerable time, and was at length disturbed by the opening of the door, and an elderly, white-haired woman tottered rather than walked into the room. Sir James spoke not, but turning round and sitting upright in his chair looked towards the white-haired woman.

“You have a son !” she said, answering his anxious look.

The Knight did not speak, but seemed to await some further intelligence.

The elderly woman came close to him, and putting her hand upon his shoulder, not familiarly, but timidly, was about to speak, when she checked herself.

“This is good news,” said Sir James, “but what else have you to say?”

The Knight made a feeble attempt at a smile, but failed, and an anxious look passed over his face as he added—

“What next—what more have you to say?”

“Can you bear what else I have to communicate, Sir James?” asked the white-haired old woman.

“I will try.”

“You have no longer a wife.”

“Leave me,” said Sir James firmly, and the old woman obeyed.

Sir James Fitzgerald uttered no word,—and some hours afterwards when the white-haired old woman again tottered into the room, she found the knight still sitting in the same place, resting his head and folded arms on the table, and, when he looked up, perceived that his face was exceedingly pale, his eyes dim, and the eye-lids considerably swollen.

The old woman went close up to the sorrowing man and laid hold of his hand ; he allowed her to lead him up the winding stairs into a small room, which looked both gay and cheerful in the firelight. There he beheld his little son, fast sleeping, drawing his pure soft breath in peace and happiness, alike heedless of a dead mother, an agonised father, or of

the blustering wind that roared and rioted outside the chamber.

Sir James Fitzgerald felt an unpleasant rising in his throat, but unwilling to let others witness unmanly tears he turned away with one glance at his sleeping babe, and without speaking left the room.

Twelve months passed, and the child grew, and from day to day the father loved him more and more. Even then he was like his mother, and the Knight delighted in looking on his smiling, handsome face, and with a sigh to think of the loved one he had so prematurely lost. His first thought in the morning was his son. If he went abroad he would first visit him ; as soon as he returned he sought him. He formed plans as he walked or rode by the way, and turned over in his mind the

future education of his beloved boy. In fact, he lived only for him. He would make him perfect, a true and valiant knight; he would train his body to exercises, fatigue and hardship, and his mind to honour, self-denial, patience and forbearance.

CHAPTER IV.

SIR JAMES FITZGERALD, like most of the knights of ancient chivalry, was superstitious, devoutly believing in ghosts, fairies, witches, omens, dreams, and such like. He delighted in looking into the future, and gave implicit credence to all that was told him touching future events, however improbable. His stout heart would quail if he heard a hooting owl or croaking raven. No old woman, in those days, would have excelled the fears of superstition which

assailed that tall, sturdy, herculean and courageous man.

One afternoon, after a long and fatiguing ride, he returned to his Tower, and, as was his wont, his first act was to see his son. Having satisfied himself of his safety, he returned to his usual sitting-room, and after taking off his riding coat, boots, &c., he flung himself into an old fashioned arm-chair, fell into a profound sleep, and, as is no uncommon thing, the thoughts that had occupied his mind during the day returned to him in his sleep.

Sir James dreamed that having ordered all things for his boy's safety in his absence ; having committed him to the especial charge of old Cecil, the senior man-at-arms, a steady grey-beard, rough as he was brave, and cautioned him to see that the child's nurse did not let her charge get into mischief, as

women were almost sure to do if left to their own devices—having done all this, he kissed his darling Thomas with long resounding kisses, and putting his foot into the stirrup, mounted his white steed, and galloped off merrily over the downs. Having crossed them, he arrived at a dense forest, which he quickly passed.

Soon after leaving the forest, he came to a somewhat deep stream which obliged him to dismount; this stream he crossed by means of a rustic bridge, his horse swimming through the water. Then he ascended the verdant hills by a craggy path. He reached their summit in time to see the sun sink in the western horizon, like a red-hot ball.

Before him lay a straggling village: youths were at their sports; leaping, shooting at a mark, laughing, holloaing, full of glee and innocent mischief. Sir Thomas pulled up

his horse for a minute to look at them, and they all stopped to look at him, for a stranger was not often seen there.

The mutual staring accomplished, the knight spurred on his horse, and drew not his rein till he came opposite the village ale-house, where sat a few men beneath a tree which spread its branches far and wide before the door. The men were talking in somewhat rough accents, and in a jargon which strangers could with difficulty understand. They were drinking ale from a large flagon which they passed from one to the other. These men, as the youths had done, stared at the knight, and made their remarks both on him and his noble looking steed.

“What a beautiful animal!” said one.

“Yes,” said a second, “that’s something like a horse.”

“I wonder who is its rider,” said the first speaker.

“Can’t tell,” said another.

“He’s a fine, noble looking fellow, be he who he may.”

“I wonder what brings him into these parts?” said the first speaker.

“Can’t imagine.”

“I dare say we shall know before long.”

Here the conversation was interrupted.

“Hallo there!” shouted Sir Thomas, and forth issued the host, who, seeing a guest, rushed at the bridle, and holding the stirrup, shouted in his turn, and forth came a comely damsel with rosy cheeks and red hair, who received the landlord’s orders to lead the horse into the stables, rub him down and give him a feed of corn; all which the red-cheeked, red-haired wench did in the most masterly style.

The landlord conducted his guest to the kitchen, where, sitting down, he stretched his sturdy limbs, and began to enquire about a witch of whom he came in search.

The landlord stared at the knight, but spoke not, and, with an almost frightened look, turned and closed the door.

“Sir,” said the landlord, seeing that his guest looked surprised, “I have shut the door for fear we should be overheard. The priest says it is unlawful to go to that—that woman, and so you see, sir, that——” and here he grumbled something indistinctly, and then clearing his voice, leant forward with his knuckles on the table, and gave his guest in a tolerably loud whisper, the information he required.

“How far is it to the place where the witch can be consulted?” asked Sir James Fitzgerald.

“ Three miles.”

“ When is she to be seen ? ”

“ At midnight.”

“ At midnight ! ” repeated Sir James.

“ Only at midnight.”

“ How am I to find my way ? ”

“ You are a stranger to these parts ? ” asked the landlord.

“ Yes.”

“ Then you will never be able to find your way.”

“ Is it so difficult ? ”

“ Yes, and—and—”

“ And what ? ”

“ Somewhat dangerous.”

“ I care nothing about the danger.”

“ Then I will conduct you to the entrance of the valley—if—”

“ If what ? ”

The landlord hemmed once or twice, and at length said—

“If you’ll make it worth my while to accompany you.”

Sir James understood his meaning, and taking out his purse gave him a coin, which the landlord received with a bow, and withdrew to get his host a tankard of ale.

The knight, after slaking his thirst with the foaming ale, went to look after his horse, somewhat doubtful of the young, red-haired girl’s powers as a groom; but there was no fault to find with her arrangements, and when he returned to the kitchen he found the rosy-cheeked damsel busily engaged in preparing his supper. He watched her movements with interest; she drew forth from an iron pot which stood on the logs of wood, a huge piece of bacon, and from a second pot she extracted

a large fowl, both of which she placed on brown dishes.

The dishes being placed upon the table, the host, the knight, and the damsel (who was the landlord's daughter), sat down to supper. Few words passed between them ; they were busy and taciturn, not feeding delicately, or sparingly, or with mincing appetites. The knight had ridden hard all day ; the man and his daughter had worked hard ; and the bacon, the fowl and the brown bread, bore ample witness to their day's work ; nor must we omit to mention that the foaming ale did its part in restoring tired nature.

Supper at length ended, and the *debris* cleared away by the rosy maiden, she retired by moonlight to her bed. The landlord also retired, and Sir James flung himself on the ground and stared at the moon through the

window, and was not long ere he fell fast asleep, to rest till the landlord should come and call him for his nocturnal walk.

An hour before twelve o'clock, the host was as good as his word; he aroused his guest and stood before him with a stout stick in his hand ready for his midnight walk. The knight instantly arose, and following the landlord, the door was noiselessly opened and as cautiously closed again, and passing through the stable-yard, the two stood on the wide heath.

They were neither of them men of very many words, and having observed that it was a fine night, off they went in solemn silence. They took a little path across the wide heath, which looked doubly wide in the moonlight, for it was difficult to see distinctly on that flat, where the earth ended and the sky began.

They reached the edge of the heath, descended a steep bank, which was a somewhat difficult achievement, the path, or rather, way, leading through craggy ground, overgrown by thick bushes and brambles. They walked briskly on, and no sound was heard but that of their footsteps, and the landlord's heavy staff as it struck from time to time on the rocky ground.

Every step they took, the path became narrower and narrower, and at length vanished altogether. The rocks became larger and larger and interspersed with trees.

"Stop!" cried the host, in a voice little above a whisper.

His companion halted and said—

"Well?"

The landlord looked cautiously about him,

and then pointed out to his companion two square-shaped, high rocks, standing side by side, and crowned with tall shrubs. They stood so close to each other that, being in shade, they seemed but one.

“That, sir, is your way,” said the guide, pointing out to the knight an extremely narrow path between the two rocks.

“Do you not intend going with me to the valley?” asked the knight.

“Go with you to the valley!” repeated the man.

“Yes; why not?”

“Because—because—”

“Because you are afraid of the priest,” observed the knight.

“No; not of the priest.”

“Then of what are you afraid?”

“Of the witch!”

“What! a man afraid of a woman?” said the knight contemptuously.

“She’s a devil!”

“A devil!”

“Yes, a devil, and surrounded by a legion of imps.”

“Well,” said Sir James, somewhat scornfully, “how, when I get to the end of the path, for I see something like a road to the left?”

“Keep straight on, turning neither to the right nor to the left; go down the valley where the path ends. It is narrow and long. Keep straight on, and may the blessed Virgin take you under her holy guidance and protect you.”

“Thank you, my man,” said the knight; and squeezing himself with difficulty through the narrow opening, pursued his way alone.

The path was bordered by craggy rocks on which the creepers grew luxuriantly, intertwining so fondly as to make the path one of difficulty as well as very dark; so the knight stumbled on, over stones and rough earth, till, the craggs becoming suddenly wider apart, the moon shone brightly down their sides and shewed him that he stood at the end of the path in a space, surrounded by rocks, scarce thirty feet across and a hundred long, which he traversed, and found between the rocks an opening similar to that at the end by which he had entered.

Through this opening he passed. It led downwards, no longer between rocks, but amongst high brambles and briars, and after that amidst dark fir trees. As he proceeded the path became more and more indistinct, till, at length, there was no path at all.

The knight, however, was nothing daunted, but remembering his host's instructions to turn neither to the right nor to the left, he held straight on, breaking his way through brushwood and thorns, receiving many scratches and some falls, still persevering and still descending, till, after about quarter of an hour's hard labour, he stood in the valley.

This valley was very deep and more like a huge cleft than a vale, its sides were lined with trees, in which the lone nightingale was pouring forth its inimitable notes. The knight stopped for a few minutes, wiped his heated brow, and again pursued his walk. It led him straight forward for a time, and then by a sudden turn brought him to a black, deep, yet narrow stream, the murmuring of which Sir James had distinctly heard some time before he reached it.

Confined within narrow bounds the stream was rather deep, the water flowing rapidly, Sir James was obliged to leap across, for bridge there was none, and a good leap it was, requiring strong muscles and an active body to achieve.

On he went, another quarter of a mile was traversed, and at length he stood in view of the abode he sought.

CHAPTER V.

SIR James Fitzgerald, the moment he came in sight of the house in which the witch resided, stopped under the dark shade of the trees, and ensconcing himself behind some thick bushes, leisurely surveyed the scene before him.

He stood at one end of an open space on which a soft green turf was spread smooth as a lawn. At the opposite end he could perceive the entrance to a cave, from which

issued a red light. All was still as death ; no nightingale sang on the boughs, no wind rustled the leaves on the trees, there was not the slightest appearance of animation in all around.

In the middle of the lawn stood a woman, having more the appearance of a splendidly chiselled statue than what she was, a tall, erect, beautifully formed woman. Her bare arms were round and polished as marble, and her long black hair hung to its full length around her, covering a neck and throat a sculptor might have copied, and reaching below her waist. Her pale face was upturned towards the moon ; her large black, lustrous eyes shining like diamonds in its light ; her brows were slightly knit, as though in sorrow ; her full red lips were parted, as she began to sing, in somewhat melancholy tones,

slowly and sadly, without moving from the spot on which she stood.

The knight was entranced; he felt unable to move or to speak. No sooner had the last words of the song died away than the notes of a horn were heard sounding faintly but clearly like an echo. From what point these sounds came the knight could not tell, they seemed to be in the air, and then they died away.

The woman crossed her hands on her breast and throwing back her head smiled very sadly, whilst her lustrous eyes seemed to burn and flash with madness.

Suddenly another figure stood by her side, the figure of a tall and handsome man, white and livid, as though worn down by sickness. His eyes were glassy and fixed, and his hair hung long and dank around his sunken cheeks.

He had the semblance of a huntsman. He folded the lovely woman in his arms, and then mourned sorrowfully as she hid her face on his breast.

“ Oh ! how cold, how very cold you are,” she said, fixing her burning looks on his motionless dim eyes. “ Thy life hath left thee for ever. Oh ! the murderous villain to rob me of my love. But thou art mine still. I have sold my very soul for you. I have learnt to use incantations that will bring you nightly from your dark bed. The slow and subtle poison that stole your life by inches hath not subdued our love.”

Again she hid her face on his breast, and again she mourned sorrowfully. He took her hand : a cold shudder ran through her whole frame.

“ I love you still,” said the spectre in a low

sepulchral voice, with seeming pain and effort, "Death has not and cannot destroy my love for you."

A voice sounded high in the air, and then died away fainter and fainter, as if repeated by numerous echoes.

"You will come again to-morrow?" said the beautiful woman, as she clung lovingly to the spectre.

"I will come if you call me, love," he returned, "your call shall be obeyed. Farewell, beloved one!"

The spectre kissed her with his livid lips over and over again, and she stood alone, fixed as a statue, her eyes rivetted to the spot he had occupied. After a minute she sighed heavily and deeply, and, pressing her hands to her eyes, fell on her knees and wept most bitterly.

She remained on her knees for some minutes; then wringing her hands, she dried her tears with her long hair, and arising walked slowly and sorrowfully towards the entrance of the cave.

While this strange and mysterious scene was enacted, Sir James Fitzgerald's sensations were not, as may be imagined, of the most enviable description, and now that it was over, his feelings were of a kind he had never before experienced, and as he frequently said to himself afterwards, he hoped he never should again.

Drops of—fear, yes, fear gathered on his forehead; his bristling hair stood erect; his sturdy knees literally trembled, and his strong jaws chattered against each other. His hands, too, the hands that had wielded the lance and the battle-axe, and dealt such blows in bloody

frays, as steadily as a lady would have threaded a needle, now shook in a marvellous and uncontrollable manner.

He leaned his back against a tree, and folding his brawny arms, endeavoured to regain his wonted calm and courage. This, however, he felt he should be unable to accomplish so long as he remained in that valley. He had serious thoughts of returning without learning what he had come thus far to know, and actually walked back to the black stream, where he halted, and after a minute began to take himself to task. After a few minutes the valorous but superstitious knight braced up his nerves, and marched back again with an air of determination, though he continually jerked his head from side to side, as though he feared spectres, demons, and every supernatural horror, such

as at that period was believed in ; and so reached the mouth of the cave.

As he was about to cross the threshold, two huge snakes wound suddenly around him, their small black eyes gleaming on him, their hissing mouths placed close to his. The knight uttered an exclamation and started back.

“Fear nothing,” said the beautiful woman he had previously seen, stepping towards him ; and unwinding the serpents from about him, they wriggled into a dark corner, and she bade him enter.

The cave was of large dimensions and perfectly dry ; the floor of hard sand. In the centre was a table of stone, on which stood a large iron lamp, and an hour glass. At this table sat an ill-favoured looking imp devouring something from a dish, which if not eels, looked very much like stewed snakes, par-

ticularly a head which he took up in his long, bony fingers. He ate apparently with great gusto. He had a round head, the back part of which resembled that of a cat's, with the ears of the same animal and eyes to match—large, round, and glistening, whilst his visage merged into a long pointed beak, from which might be seen to issue from time to time, with the speed of lightning, a long, slender, and very crimson tongue. His body was black and covered with a skin, hairy, shining, and black, like a mole's. His arms and hands were lank and long, the fingers ending in hard claws. His legs and feet bore a great resemblance to them, and he wagged and whisked about his long black tail, which was like that of a horse.

This ugly looking creature did not suspend his pastime as the knight entered and stared

at him in dread and amazement, mixed in spite of the woman's words, with something approaching fear.

By the clear bright lamp-light Sir James Fitzgerald gazed on the witch, astonished at her dazzling beauty. Her features were perfect. Her face was, perhaps, a trifle too thin, and the expression too melancholy; but her large lustrous eyes, shaded by the long, up-turned lashes and beautifully marked arching brows—although there was in them the expression of that insanity which seems to look at things others cannot see—shone with a marvellously beautiful and burning blackness. Her form and her bare arms were perfect, and the knight, between admiration of the witch and horror of her familiar, stood, in silence, staring with open mouth.

It was not till the woman asked him why

he sought her, that Sir James found words to speak, and then, in answer to her soft, melodious voice, he stammered forth his errand, more like a school-boy than a brave man as he most assuredly was.

For some considerable time the woman appeared immersed in thought, but at length asked him many questions about his boy, the day, hour, and month of his birth, as well as many others, to all of which the knight answered as well as he was able, but with much the air of a rustic who, for the first time, finds himself in an unusual situation; and in truth the tall, handsome knight twirled his cap in his hand, and stood first on one foot, then on the other, from time to time casting glances of dread and disgust at the ugly imp who was sucking wine from a cup, and

throwing up his head like a hen in the act of swallowing.

The witch bade the beaked familiar attend on her. He brought forth from some recess in the cave a book, which he placed on the table, a censer, in which he put burning coals, and a large jar, full of incense. He next brought a magnificent mantle, which he placed on his mistress's shoulders, with all the care and cleverness of a *femme de chambre*, and then, taking the censer in his hand, put into it some incense. Having fulfilled his duties thus far, he took his place opposite to his mistress.

The witch bade Sir James lie down full length at her feet, which command he immediately obeyed, and then taking up the book, she opened it, and commenced reading, in a

soft, melodious voice. As she proceeded, the knight could distinctly hear from without, the sound of numerous feet running rapidly towards the cave, and the next instant it was filled with imps, half of them bearing censers, the other half huge flaring torches, emitting a sulphurous smell, and giving out a lurid, red light. They were all monsters—some with cats' heads—like the imp that waited on the witch—others with dogs' heads, some with misshapen human faces; but all alike hideous to look upon.

These loathsome monsters gave out a wild, loud, unceasing chorus, so rapid, yelling, and discordant, that it seemed as though no amount of breath would be sufficient to keep it up. They twisted and tossed their censers violently, clanking the chains and stamping with their feet, flourishing their torches, and

filling the place with an indescribable confusion. Some shouted, and shrieked, and yelled, the unearthly chorus still continuing, till the knight's senses seemed on the point of leaving him.

The witch still went on with her soft reading, and, making a sign to her familiar, he brought forth a cup and presented it to the prostrate knight, who hesitated to drink.

“Drink!” said the imp, scratching his face with his long claws, “or we’ll tear you in pieces.”

If a turkey-cock could have spoken, the voice would have sounded like the imp’s.

Sir James still hesitated.

“Drink!” shrieked the imp, putting the cup to the knight’s lips.

The knight emptied the cup of its luscious contents. It was a liquor somewhat sweet

but by no means unpleasant, and in an instant it seemed to run through all his veins, taking away every particle of strength, and making him feel a degree of languor amounting to weakness, so soft and agreeable that he would willingly have lain there and felt thus for ever.

The monster imps kept up their horribly discordant chorus; the smell of the incense was overpowering, and the air in the cave was hot and parching.

Sir James had rested his head on one of his arms and hands; but now his languor became so great, he was no longer able to do so, and he fell flat on his back. However, he did not lose his consciousness; he still heard the chorus of imps, and saw the red-lighted cave, and smelt the suffocating incense, but he had no power to move; he was chained

as if under the influence of night-mare. He strove in vain to move or speak; he exerted the whole strength of his will, but could not so much as move his finger. He felt that he must die if he did not rise; but rise or move he could not. Anon he heard the soft fanning of wings. A huge bat, large as an eagle, lighted on his breast, and fanned his parched face, humming very softly, as a nurse would to a child, and rubbing his forehead with its soft ears.

The yelling, hooting, screaming of the horrible imps seemed to cease, the light to vanish, the parching air to give place to a cooling breeze, the humming of the bat to die away. Sir James gave a lengthened, gentle sigh, and from that moment became unconscious of all outward events.

When Sir James Fitzgerald again became

conscious he heard a long, shrill whistle, which increased by degrees into a boisterous wind, and in the course of a few minutes subsided into a human voice, soft and soothing like that of the sorceress. It appeared to his confused perception as if he were in a cavern of almost boundless extent, so dark that he could with difficulty see its high roof, and exceedingly cold. He stood on a pinnacle of rock, very lofty, but so narrow as scarcely to allow room for his feet. A whirling, eddying, splashing, roaring torrent ran through the cave, throwing its spray from side to side. The voice sounded cold and unearthly echoing through the vast cavern.

These were the words which the astonished knight heard:—

“Thy son shall be a valiant knight. In youth, love shall mar him—in manhood it

shall make him. England shall lose him—a foreign land shall gain him !”

The voice ceased. The knight felt exceedingly giddy, and completely overpowered; and, dashing himself headlong from the rock, plunged into the black foaming water.



Sir James Fitzgerald opened his eyes, he was reclining in his easy arm-chair. He stretched himself, rubbed his forehead, and sat upright. His head ached violently and throbbed vehemently. The events of his dream rushed on his mind, confusing and puzzling him. He looked around the room, reflecting on all that had seemed to occur, on the witch, the spectre, the imps, and more especially on the *oracular voice*.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR JAMES FITZGERALD next day could think of nothing but his dream. He could distinctly remember every event until the moment he lost his consciousness; but after that he could not bring clearly to mind anything that had appeared to him.

“‘He shall be a valiant knight,’” said he, to himself, “so far so good. I’ll see to that. ‘In youth, love shall mar him!’” Here Sir James made a wry face. “I must see to that

too. I'll give him a horror of women. 'In manhood, love shall make him.' I've nothing to do with that. 'England shall lose him, a foreign land shall gain him.' I shall be dead by that time perhaps. All I have to do is to train him for a sturdy knight, and bid him carefully avoid the wiles of women till he attains a ripe age.

"I have nothing to leave the boy but an untarnished name and this old Tower. By my spurs I very much doubt if I shall ever have it in my power to buy him a suit of armour; so he must grow to the shape and size of mine, if it is not knocked to bits by that time, and if it is, why he must go without, or win one at some tilting bout or other. At any rate I'll do my best for the boy, not alone for his own sake, but for the sake of his dear mother."

Accordingly, at seven years of age little Thomas Fitzgerald's education began in earnest, under the worthy knight's superintendence.

The sturdy country-woman, who had nursed him through infancy, took her departure with many tears and promises of visits to and from her charge; and the boy was left in the hands of men to attain the accomplishments requisite to his future career.

The boy's wooden sword and plaything bow and arrows were discarded. He was decked with a real dagger, of which he was not a little proud, a good yew bow, fit for his age, was provided, and a target set up for him on the downs, at which old Cecil, who was an expert shot, taught him to let fly his arrows, and soon gloried in his pupil's expertness.

The boy was moreover promoted from an occasional ride on his father's broad-backed steed, across which his little legs were stretched nearly horizontally from the hips, to a little steed of his own, somewhat shaggy perhaps on its first arrival, but by little Thomas's and old Cecil's care, soon groomed into a respectable condition. On this fleet little animal the boy was perched every day, without saddle or bridle, till he could keep himself on at all paces, as well as in kicking and in rearing.

A quintain was set up, at which he rode with a light lance, and after receiving blows enough on the back from the said quintain's wooden sword to have killed a whole regiment of spoilt boys, he managed it with great dexterity, to the infinite joy and pride of Sir James's heart, not to speak of old Cecil, who

swore, "Measter Thomas would have made the knights of the round table to look like so many gaping idiots."

Now, too, the little urchin was made to use his sword, double and single handed, to flourish about a small wooden mace, laden with lead, and a hatchet, to initiate him into the art of hunting out souls with a battle-axe.

There was no great difficulty in inducing him to these studies. He was up with the sun, fresh and merry, and ready for his toils, and sought his little hard bed—a few planks with a log for a pillow—tired out, but joyous and happy. He was a handsome little fellow, with clear blue eyes and golden hair, curling crisp all over his little head, around his blue veined temples and snow white poll. His costume was a tunic, plain and simple, of dark green cloth, a leathern belt, and crimson hose.

He leapt and ran with wonderful activity, liked to try his strength against his father's men, and they were ever ready to be either teaching or playing with him. It was an amusing, but no uncommon sight, to see a great square man on his knees sparring with little Thomas, laughing and now warding off the blows, and then allowing himself to be hit, whilst his little adversary put his whole soul into this sham fight, clenched his little fists, planted his feet firmly, and with heightened colour dealt blows that would have done damage to one of his own age. The bystanders laughed and applauded. They all adored little Master Thomas, whose good nature, kindness of heart, and chivalrous decorum even then were great.

Sir James loved his son beyond what words can express, but staunch and reasonable never

spoiled him. He was taught to bear the disappointments of his age without a word or a murmur, to deny himself many little pleasures, to give way to others, to perform all his promises scrupulously, to be frank, and without reserve to prefer all mankind before himself ; to bear pain and hardship without a complaint, and utterly to despise all softness, effeminacy, love of ease and cowardice. He was made to serve his father as his page, to stand in his presence, to wait on him at his repast, to keep silence till he was spoken to, and then to answer with respect. Reading and writing, being deemed fit only for monks, were completely ignored ; but instead he could polish arms to rival the brightness of the sun, and groom a horse till its coat had the appearance of velvet.

So his life went on, and from a pretty child

he became a strong, handsome boy, well versed in the rudiments of a good knight's education. He rode hunting with his father, and could train or fly a hawk with the best falconer. His shoulders were wide, his chest expanded, and his head put on with a proud and dignified air, which might have been insolent if it had not been for the humble, modest, and yet firm and unshrinking expression of his handsome face. His walk was light and springy, but bold and manly. His well-shaped arms hung gracefully from his shoulders, and his whole air was that of a well-born person, trained to active exercises.

Sir James watched him fondly and proudly. He was everything he could desire as a son, as promising as a hero. Brave, strong, active, handsome ; well made, full of spirit, yet temperate, enduring, patient ; enterprising, but

not rash ; frank and honest, without roughness ; kind, tender-hearted, pitiful, hardy, knowing his own value, yet humble, and without a wish to obtain from any more or even as much as he deserved. These were the qualities which in young Thomas Fitzgerald were already expanding. Time was fast bringing them to perfection.

At the age of fourteen Sir James began to tell himself that it would be expedient to place his son in the castle of some rich, warlike lord, where he might meet with advantages which would put the finishing stroke to his education, and fit him for chivalry. Accordingly he looked for such a one, and after some consideration he thought he had found him in the person of Lord Bruce.

This Lord Bruce was a powerful baron, and lived as a powerful baron should live, in a

strong castle, all turrets and towers, with moat and loopholes. He kept a mighty train of knights, esquires, pages, archers, and men-at-arms. Lord Bruce, too, was proud, and tyrannical as he was proud, and had a wife as proud and tyrannical as himself, and a hot-headed, overbearing young son, and two beautiful daughters, as haughty as they were beautiful.

Lord Bruce being tyrannical and overbearing,—and other people not liking such humours and not considering themselves bound to put up with them,—his life was one of perpetual warfare, being constantly quarrelling and fighting with some one or other of his neighbours. His castle, therefore, was a good school, or rather a good fighting school, for a future knight, and Sir James Fitzgerald considered himself extremely fortunate when this

quarrelsome baron consented to admit young Thomas into his household as a page.

The evening before the youth's departure, Sir James told his son of the dream he had had, which he acknowledged had influenced all the training bestowed on him, and of the words which he had heard, to all of which Thomas listened patiently and respectfully.

"Fear not for me, sir. It is my wish to make myself warlike and renowned, and not to waste my time with women," said the boy respectfully.

"You are quite right, my son. Remember it is your duty to behave courteously to them, to protect them, and to look with indulgence on their little weaknesses. But, my boy, never suffer yourself to be enslaved by any one among them; never forget thy warlike renown to do the will of a woman; never live

at ease with them in silky softness, whilst you can be in the field, and though thy heart should feel for tears of real distress never give heed to weak or feigned tears that might lead you from your duty.

“Whilst thy youth lasts, my dear boy,” continued the father, “think on arms alone. ‘In manhood love will make thee.’ Then you may look on the smiles and beauty of women to your heart’s content; but even then see that you don’t become the mere slave of a woman, however lovely she may be, for depend on it that is the worst slavery a man can know. It makes him less than a man; it takes from him honour, glory, renown; makes courage of no avail. He takes delight to watch for a silly woman’s smile, and glories to do her bidding, be it what it may, and for the most part ’tis but to sigh at

her feet, to dress like a holiday page, and look at none but her. My boy, be nothing of this sort. Wait until you attain to ripe manhood, and then, having won a name in arms, choose where you will, but as I said before be careful that you lose not your liberty."

"Fear not, sir, that I shall be unmindful of this advice. I will do all these things," replied Thomas Fitzgerald.

"I have no fear, my son."

Now Thomas Fitzgerald had never been above ten miles from his father's Tower, had never beheld a castle; had seen nothing but hunting, exercising, and his father's household; therefore, when he arrived at Lord Bruce's castle he surveyed the lofty towers and high walls, the deep moat, the large and ponderous gate, with a great and silent wonder.

This wonder increased as father and son entered the court-yard. There the youth beheld men, some armed, some lounging about, talking, laughing, playing with their dogs, or sleeping in the shade. His heart beat joyfully as he thought that was to be his abode, and those he beheld his companions. He said nothing, but his father, who had watched him, smiled at his look of pleasure and astonishment.

Sir James called to a smart young page, who was bounding over the court, who forthwith conducted the knight and his son to the hall, till he ascertained if it were Lord Bruce's pleasure to receive them.

"It is as large as our church," said Thomas Fitzgerald, and these were the first words he had spoken since their arrival, "and what fine arms those are against the wall !"

Two pages were playing together on the long table, and they looked with some contempt on young Fitzgerald's plain costume. He was too intent on all he saw to remark them, and presently the page to whom Sir James had spoken returned to their side and requested them to follow him.

He led them through many a long dark corridor, till he stopped before a door, which, after doffing his cap and looking behind him, to see if the strangers he conducted were following, he gently opened, and drawing back a thick scarlet curtain, he ushered them into the presence of the lord of the castle.

Lord Bruce was sitting very intent on doing nothing. Lady Bruce, whose boudoir they were in, was equally engrossed by some embroidery, and two young girls, one about fourteen, the other about seventeen, were ar-

ranging a number of silks, according to their different shades.

Lord Bruce appeared about forty-eight, tall, very thin, rather well-featured, somewhat dark and bilious-looking, with a fretful expression of ill-humour about his brows and the corner of his mouth, exceedingly unprepossessing to look upon. He was magnificently dressed, and his whole air, despite his sour expression, was really aristocratic.

Lady Bruce had the same expression of countenance. She was almost the counterpart of her lord, with the addition of an imperious toss of the head and a knitting of the brows, anything but encouraging to timidity and gentleness.

The two daughters were like each other, and very much resembled their parents, with the exception that their complexions were

healthy and soft, and their dark hazel eyes beautiful, though they had a fiery, proud look, which, with their aquiline noses, gave promise of an awful style of beauty.

They all stared at Sir James Fitzgerald and his son. Lord Bruce rose to receive them, and the page pushed forward a huge, carved chair for the knight, but allowed young Thomas to remain standing.

Neither the knight nor his son were abashed by the looks of the lord and lady and their progeny, although those looks were charitably intended to put them very ill at ease. Sir James sat as unembarrassed as he would have done had he been on his charger, and young Thomas Fitzgerald stood erect, modest but confident.

The youth answered all Lord Bruce's questions, which were put with half-closed eyes

and a supercilious voice, in a firm, respectful manner, looking steadily at his interrogator, with his large, clear, unshrinking eyes. It must be confessed, however, that the audacious gazing of the little damsels for one moment, but only for a moment, called a blush to his sun-burnt cheek, whereupon he reproached himself, saying in his mind, "A well-born youth should not shrink before the bold and unfeminine glances of a couple of girls," and Master Thomas drew himself up and demeaned himself so coolly as he looked at them for one moment, that the blushes were transferred to their cheeks, and they betook themselves to their apparent occupation in attending to their silks.

Everything being satisfactorily arranged, Sir James and his son withdrew, and Lord Bruce, his wife and their children pronounced

them to be a couple of boorish upstarts; but the girls qualified their censures by saying that the new page was very handsome.

“That is a very unbecoming observation,” said Lady Bruce, drawing herself up and looking as severe as she was able. “Young ladies of your high birth should not see beauty in any one beneath a Baron’s eldest son. Nay, they should not look on any below that rank save as machines to attend to all their wants and to do their bidding.”

With their accustomed pride the two young girls assented, they tossed their heads and looked very beautiful and very grand, but in their weak human hearts, they still thought Thomas Fitzgerald a very handsome youth.

CHAPTER VII.

IF Thomas Fitzgerald had been declared a good-looking youth in his homely garb, much more might he be deemed so in the handsome dress of one of Lord Bruce's pages. A kind of jacket of dark purple velvet, made low in the throat, sat tight to his figure and showed off to the greatest possible advantage his broad chest and shoulders. His well-made limbs were clad in cloth of purple with yellow stripes. A silver mounted *couteau de chasse*

hung at his side, and a purple velvet cap, with a white feather, was jauntily perched on the top of his bright curls.

He was the page of pages, taller than any of his fellows by half a head, and, without fawning, so steady and so respectful, that the techy Lord Bruce soon looked on him with an especial favor, whilst his comrades loved him for his frank manliness, his expertness in all athletic and other exercises, his perfect unselfishness, his invariable truthfulness, and never failing good humour.

It happened about a year after young Fitzgerald had entered the service of Lord Bruce, that on a certain fine spring morning, Bertha and Justine, the two daughters of the lord, walked out to a wood in the vicinity of the castle, to chat over their private affairs, to pluck violets and primroses, and listen to the songs

of the birds, and so pass the morning. All this they accomplished, much to the pleasure and satisfaction of both, besides washing their little dog in a stream and drying him in the sun, till at length, fatigued with their stroll and the langour of the day, they began to retrace their steps towards the castle, the little dog barking and frisking, sometimes before them and sometimes close at their side.

With much regret they were about to leave the cool shade of the wood, for a walk under the hot rays of the sun across the green-sward towards the castle.

At this moment they perceived a man sitting on the border of the wood under a tree; he was mumbling to himself, and apparently engaged in trimming an arrow. He was an ill-favoured creature, looked somewhere about thirty-six or seven years of age, scantily clad in

a pair of trousers that only reached about half-way down his thighs, and a torn, threadbare, common tunic, unbuttoned and showing his sunburnt and bare breast. His thick, red beard, was coarse and shaggy, whilst his tangled mass of red hair was covered with a greasy old velvet cap, pulled down to his eyes. These were black and fierce looking, and on his features were stamped legibly enough, "rogue" and "reprobate."

In spite of all his filth and squalor he appeared full of vigour and rude health, and as the two girls drew near he looked up, and, pulling off his cap, addressed them in a rough, loud, deep voice, which he in vain strove to make piteous and languid.

"Kind ladies, pretty ladies, be pitiful to me, a poor sailor, who has been wrecked in a storm. I've not tasted a morsel of food for

three whole days. Please, dear ladies, relieve me, and I will pray to the blessed Virgin to keep you here and hereafter."

Bertha, the elder of the two, hurried on, her sister, dreadfully alarmed, clinging to her arm; their colour came and went, and their hearts beat quickly; but they spoke not, as they passed the ill-favoured man.

They did not see his mischievous look as he raised his sturdy figure from the earth and shambled after them, with the professional gait and stoop of his class.

"For the Virgin's sake have pity on me, kind ladies," he said, scratching his head as he walked close by their side. His speech was uttered in a somewhat dictatorial tone.

"We have nothing to give," said Bertha, trying, in the midst of her fright, to look both haughty and proud.

“ You have plenty of rings and chains,” cried the beggar, stopping their progress by planting himself in their path ; “ and you have chains and rings, too,” he continued speaking, and looking at Justine, setting his arms a-kimbo and nodding his head at them in a very insolent manner.

The sisters knew not whether to fly or faint; speak they could not.

“ Come,” cried the rough fellow, in a loud, arrogant manner, “ give me those chains and rings ; for have them I will, by either fair means or foul.”

Having made this threat, he immediately seized Bertha by the arm, and Justine by her dress.

Both the girls screamed with hearty good will, and the beggar cursed and swore, and shook and threatened them.

The screaming produced the hoped for effect. Fitzgerald—who had observed the ladies go towards the wood in the morning, and who had not long after seen the sturdy beggar take the same route—fearful for their safety, had armed himself with a mace, which he found on the hall table, and sallying forth had followed the beggar, and lay in ambush close to the place which the sturdy vagabond had selected for sitting down, knowing that Lord Bruce's daughters must again pass the spot on their return to the castle.

Fitzgerald was in no way daunted by the size and strength of the beggar, and the moment he saw him rise and address the sisters, than, leaving his hiding place, he followed him. No sooner were the screams uttered than he dashed forward, and swinging the mace round his head, he let it fall so suddenly

and with such good effect between the shoulders of the sturdy vagabond, that it caused him both to stagger and let go his hold of the two young ladies. Fitzgerald, following up his success, flew upon him, and, tripping his heels, dashed him on the ground, and then throwing himself upon him, held him there with all his might.

“Fly, ladies, fly!” the youth exclaimed.

“Curse you!” roared the vagabond.

“Fly, ladies!” repeated the youth, still holding the beggar in his iron grasp.

Not waiting to have the intimation again repeated, the girls fled like the wind, and stopped not till they reached the castle.

A youth of sixteen is not an equal match for a powerful man of five-and-thirty; and so poor Fitzgerald found, when the beggar, rising, endeavoured to shake him off. Still, with all

the odds against him, the page clung to his opponent like a mastiff, his teeth firmly set, and without uttering a sound, anxious to keep him at bay till the two damsels should be sufficiently far off to be in safety.

In vain the man tried to shake off his assailant. Fitzgerald could not conquer him, but he would not set him free. Many a hard blow was given him, but the harder the blow the more determined he became, and the more firmly and coolly he clung. At length, however, he let go his clasp, and standing upright and panting for breath, said—

“Be off, you miscreant, and remember that ill deeds are not always unseen.”

The beggar made no reply, but picking up the mace, which, in the encounter, Fitzgerald had let fall to the ground, he gave the youth a tremendous blow on the forehead that

laid him bleeding and senseless on the ground.

“That will cool your hot blood,” cried the vagabond, “you have prevented me getting the jewels and gold trinkets, but I’ll not go away empty handed.”

Then plundering the senseless youth of his silver-hilted sword and velvet cap, he took to his heels and decamped.

Meanwhile, the two young girls, Fitzgerald had so gallantly rescued, ran with the utmost speed till they reached the castle, and scampering over the drawbridge, screamed at the portcullis with all their might. No sooner was it raised than in they ran, to the no small astonishment of all who saw them; nor did they stop till they entered Lady Bruce’s apartment, where Justine threw herself into her mother’s arms and cried piteously,

whilst Bertha clung to her father as though the rough beggar was behind her.

The Baron and his Lady could not understand the terror that had seized both their daughters. The former was the first to speak.

“What has happened to cause this undignified entrance into the castle?”

Justine clung more closely to her mother, and Bertha could not restrain her tears.

Both the Baron and his Lady took part in the terror of the children.

“What has happened?” again asked the now alarmed Baron.

“We have been waylaid by a murderous ruffian.”

“Waylaid!” repeated the Baron.

“Yes,” said Bertha, “just as we were quitting the wood to return to the castle, we

were seized by a ruffianly, ill-looking man, who swore he would have our rings and chains, and—”

“Yes,” interrupted Justine, who had by this time somewhat recovered from her fright, “and I verily believe he would have murdered us had not help been near at hand.”

“Who was your preserver, my child?” asked Lady Bruce.

“Young Fitzgerald,” cried Bertha.

“Where is the youth?” asked the Baron.

“Alas! alas!” replied Bertha, pressing her hands together, “the ruffian, I fear, may have murdered him!”

“My child,” said her father, “there is no need to waste one *alas!* on a page, even should he be slain. However, it will be as well to know what may have become of him, and I will thank him for his service, and re-

ward him, and permit you and your sister to do likewise, provided that the youth be not slain."

In spite of her pride, Bertha thought her father exceedingly harsh; and leaned to the opinion, that Fitzgerald deserved somewhat more than cold thanks for his timely assistance and brave conduct.

Justine's weeping having entirely subsided, the sisters were ordered to withdraw and resume their wonted decorum. When this was done, and they were alone in their own chamber, Bertha ventured to say—

"Don't you think, Justine, that young Fitzgerald is a very courageous person?"

"Yes," replied Justine.

"And very good looking."

"Yes."

"Don't you think, Justine, he deserves more than mere thanks?"

“Yes.”

“What should we have done had he not come to our rescue?”

“I can’t tell,” said Justine.

“What a horrid wretch that beggar was,” said Bertha.

“Yes.”

“And such a powerful man—so much stronger than Fitzgerald.”

“Yes.”

“Oh! I do hope that the poor youth has escaped from him.”

Bertha, meeting with no opposition, from her sister, again remarked —

“It’s a great pity so handsome and valiant a youth is not a baron’s eldest son. Don’t you think so, Justine?”

“Perhaps,” replied Justine, “but do not let us talk any more about him. Ladies of

high rank have nothing in common with pages or esquires, unless they also be of rank. This Fitzgerald's father is nothing but a poor knight."

Here the little damsel gave her head a proud jerk; her little red lips pouted in scorn, and her hawk's eyes shone; and Bertha went through the same manœuvres, but the whole day she could not forget the appearance of the page, as he sprang on their aggressor, and his determined look as he held him down and bade them fly; and in spite of her pride, the image of her deliverer *would* haunt and please her, but she kept her thoughts to herself.

As soon as his daughters had retired, the Baron went into the court-yard and ordered two archers to go in search of the page. Fitzgerald's own particular friend and ally, Stephen Stanley, a page also, was standing

near when the order was given ; a slim, active little fellow, full of fire and vivacity, who looked up to Fitzgerald as the very perfection of human nature.

Hearing Lord Bruce's words, off Stephen sped like an arrow, whilst the archers followed at a more sober pace; all the people in the castle would have gone with them if their lord had not raised his voice, and, frowning, bid none stir but those he had ordered so to do.

On ran Stephen, at his best speed, till he came to the spot where his friend was just recovering his senses, and endeavouring to raise himself from the ground.

"Stop, Fitzgerald!" shouted his friend, dashing up to him with heightened colour and flashing eyes, "Stop, and I will help you."

"Thanks, Stephen. I am somewhat weak from loss of blood," replied Fitzgerald, in a very languid voice.

"The murderous villain!—Let me see if I can stop the bleeding."

"Never mind it," said Fitzgerald, "it is a mere nothing!"

"It is a very great nothing then. Just lay hold of my arm. There—now you are on your feet—we will get back to the castle, and I'll soon fetch the leech to you."

"Give me the mace," said Fitzgerald.

And they proceeded slowly towards the castle, stopping occasionally to allow Fitzgerald to rest.

"How was it, Fitz," said Stephen, "that you came in contact with the murderous villain?"

"I had watched the ruffian."

“ Watched ! ” repeated Stephen, “ as how ? ”

“ I saw him follow the Baron’s daughters, when they went for their walk, and suspected, from his appearance, that he boded them no good.”

“ So you followed his track for the purpose of protecting the damsels ? ” said his friend with a smile.

“ Yes.”

“ Upon my life, Fitz, I shall have some hopes of your overcoming your hatred of the sex ! ”

“ I don’t care for women,” said Fitzgerald, “ but I shall always, I hope, protect them when they are in danger.”

“ By Jupiter ! Fitzgerald,” cried Stephen, “ you will be a valiant knight one of these days ; and break the heart of many a damsel if

you always set your face against love as you do now."

Fitzgerald smiled, but allowed his friend to continue.

"If I were you, Fitz, with your fine figure and handsome face, I would begin the attack upon the ladies at once; by my life, you would conquer as many women as you will enemies."

Again Fitzgerald smiled and said—

"I don't care about women. I will leave them all to you, Stephen."

Arrived at his own room, Fitzgerald sat down, whilst his friend Stephen went in search of the Friar, who tended both souls and bodies, whilst the two archers spread the young page's fame all over the castle.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed ere

Stephen returned, bringing the Friar with him.

“This is an ugly wound,” said the Friar, after washing the blood from Fitzgerald’s head and face.

“Fitzgerald calls it nothing!” cried Stephen, with a smile.

“He may call it what he pleases, but I must take a little more blood!”

“More blood!” cried Stephen.

“Yes, and he must be kept perfectly quiet,” said the Friar.

“You may take the blood easily enough,” said Stephen, “but as to keeping him quiet that’s a much more difficult matter.”

“It must be accomplished nevertheless,” said the Friar, as he left the room.

That day Bertha reproached herself for

thinking that they were ill-served at their noon-day repast. The handsome page was not there.

In due time Fitzgerald's disfigurement vanished, leaving only a slight discoloration which stained his white forehead for a few days, leaving a scar which he was never likely to lose.

It was the first received but not the last.

As soon as Fitzgerald was sufficiently recovered, he was summoned to attend the lord of the castle.

"I thank you, Fitzgerald, for the good service you rendered my daughters," said Lord Bruce, with vast condescension, extending his hand for the youth to kiss, which he reverently did. "Now come, and my daughters shall also reward you with their thanks."

The two proud damsels thanked him in few words, and held out their soft white hands, which Fitzgerald just touched with his lips, and bowing to them with the greatest respect, backed out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

TIME flew pleasantly on with young Thomas Fitzgerald. He became Lord Bruce's favorite page, and was continually with him ; followed him in his walks, riding, hunting, and at mass ; waited especially on him, yet the youth cared not for an honor which some among the pages envied him.

Fitzgerald's delight was in moments he was enabled to call his own ; when he could put on a plain suit, scour the country, of which

every inch for miles around was familiar to him, climb rocks and cliffs, swim the rivers, wrestle with his superiors in strength, ride ungovernable horses and tame them; and all this he did so quietly and so unostentatiously, that few knew of his proficiency in all he undertook.

His great ally Stephen Stanley would try to follow him in his roving and sports, but Stephen was of a different character and make, and generally came back pale, wan, and exhausted; while Fitzgerald walked beneath the castle gate at a quick and springy pace, as though returning from a mere stroll.

Stephen Stanley could read and write, but had very small love for martial pursuits, though, in his admiration for his fellow page, he imagined he had, and fatigued his slim frame in endeavours to excel in them, under

his friend's tutelage. He always, however, retained his love for his studies, and returned to his music and the illuminating of books, in which he excelled, and shone as much as his crimson, blue, gold and silver designs.

Thomas Fitzgerald looked with surprise on his friend Stephen's talents, though he never attempted to use a pencil, sing a song, or learn even his alphabet.

If Fitzgerald was Lord Bruce's own especial page, Stephen Stanley was in equal favor with his lady, and the youth well became his post. He could sing to Lady Bruce and her daughters with the greatest grace and respect, and wind their silks as deferentially as Fitzgerald could hold his lord's stirrup; he could, without cringing, tie the many colored ribands on the young ladies little dog; he could read and recount to them pleasant histories, and

do their commissions with light heeled activity, and winning complaisance. His voice was soft, his manner courteous, contrasting with Fitzgerald's, whose tones were settling into a somewhat sonorous bass, whilst he spoke bluntly and shortly.

In person, as has been recorded, Stephen was slight and supple, of an olive complexion, with bright sparkling eyes, and teeth as white as snow. He was graceful, but not dignified, whereas Fitzgerald was both, and becoming as firmly knit as a sturdy fighting knight had need to be.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day was fast drawing nigh on which young Fitzgerald, from being a page, was to become an esquire, a happy day to which he impatiently looked forward ; a page's life with him being a sort of purgatory till better things should come. But if he looked forward to it impatiently, there was one whose views were in direct opposition to his, and this person was the proud, hawk-eyed, beautiful Bertha.

Bertha's beauty and charms began to be noised abroad, and many young gentlemen flocked to the castle to gaze upon her and do her gallant homage; all which young gentleman Bertha smiled upon when they were near to her, and frowned upon when won, and when other suitors came.

Bertha was herself vanquished, however, and that by a page, and by a page too, who never dreamt of such conquests. Bertha's heart was given to Fitzgerald, and whilst to use a modern phrase, she flirted in an imperious manner with her knightly lovers, her looks were ever and anon wandering towards the handsome and dignified youth.

We must, however, make it known that Fitzgerald had allowed his glances to rest somewhat too often on that superb lady, but, we believe, unknown to her. The conse-

quence was, that the page's heart took to beating oddly when he met her, or when, by Lord Bruce, he was despatched with any message to Lady Bruce's apartment; and Fitzgerald's skin, though sun-burnt, was exceedingly clear, and at such times the blood became very visible in his face, and his usually fearless eyes would look very diligently on the ground.

Now, some pages, we fear, would have given way to their nature and the pleasing sensation of falling in love, without looking to consequences; but Fitzgerald was not one of these.

"By Jupiter! I shall soon be in love," he mentally exclaimed, as he lay on his back on the hall bench, after one of his long rambles, in which posture, with his eyes shut and his arms folded over his broad chest, he

was thinking of Bertha. He instantly jumped to his feet, for he remembered the prophecy in his father's dream—"In youth, love shall mar him." "I will take care it does not though," he mentally exclaimed.

He stuck his cap on his head in a resolute manner, and walked towards the wood, where, till nightfall, he made many wise resolves, and what is more, he kept them too.

He bethought him of his father's advice, looked forward hopefully to his intended career, and told himself, if he meant to prosper, he must not love.

"Fight first and love after," he said. "I will do as my father counselled me. I will not look too much or too often on beauty, for in truth I perceive love comes in by the eyes; therefore I will imprison mine in their eyelids."

So he did, for never again did he suffer himself to gaze on Bertha. He redoubled his exercises, and kept his mind steadily fixed on a career of honour and renown—but still feeling it must be a soft pleasure to love—and resolved, till he had earned a name in arms, ladies should be as nothing to him.

Thus stood affairs when Thomas Fitzgerald's page's life was over, and he became an esquire.

This happy event Stephen Stanley communicated to Sir James Fitzgerald on a small piece of vellum, which was conveyed to him by a pedlar, and with which the knight instantly rode off, post haste, to the neighbouring monastery to get its contents read. The intelligence it contained caused him great joy.

Lord Bruce still kept Fitzgerald near him, and well did the new esquire fulfil his duties.

How happy the youth felt when on a prancing charger, and how magnificent he looked. His sparkling cuirass, wide and bulging on his chest; his light helmet pressing his golden, curling hair; his splendid figure, growing from day to day more manly; the grace with which he bore his master's arms; his calm and dignified demeanour, but added more and more to Bertha's flame. She looked in vain among her knights for one like him, and sighed day and night for Thomas Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald, too, would think what joy there must be in loving and being beloved by her, and he looked on her lovers and sighed.

“ ‘ In youth love will mar him,’ ” he said. “ No, no, it will never do. I love her, but it shall be as though I loved her not. No, by Jupiter! love shall *not* mar me.”

And so Thomas Fitzgerald, though Love touched him, would in no wise allow the little god to take him captive.

Well, as it has ever done, time rolled on, and the days of his esquireship passed away. Behold him keeping the *veilles d'armes* alone in the castle chapel. What happy thoughts were in his mind! The very next day he was to become a knight—the world before him, a strong body and a dauntless mind to carve his way to glory—and glory he determined should be his.

Then, too, he prayed, and hunger assailed him as he knelt, fasting, before the altar. Sleep was far from his thoughts, and his eyes wandered from the flickering tapers, and the lamp which shone on the bright armour Lord Bruce had bestowed upon him, and he tried to penetrate the gloom of the chapel.

A dim light suddenly broke in upon his vision. It approached nearer and nearer as he gazed. He rubbed his eyes and again peered out into the gloom. He imagined some trick was being tried upon him, or that his eyes deceived him. A light foot pattered on the pavement, and after a moment he discovered that it was the tall, superb figure of Bertha that was approaching stealthily towards him.

She entered the choir. Fitzgerald's heart beat audibly, and he stood rooted to the spot. Now this was not befitting conduct for a lady of high rank; but love not only "laughs at locksmiths," but nobility as well, and in fact at everything but his own wayward exploits; and this sly god had so wounded and lacerated the heart of Bertha, and so infatuated her girlish understanding, that he induced her,

the proud and beauteous child of a proud and overbearing noble of the land, to undertake her present escapade; whilst pride, enlisting on the side of love, told her she had but to speak, and Fitzgerald was hers. This was wild imagining; but Bertha was unacquainted with the world's ways, and knew not human nature, and her imagination and her passion were alone her guides.

She drew near to Fitzgerald, and he, somewhat recovering from the surprise, bowed and coloured, but immediately resumed his martial, upright position.

"Fitzgerald," said the damsel, in a soft and tender tone, which made the sturdy youth so addressed tremble.

"Madam," he replied, in a somewhat hoarse voice, looking up, and beholding two most beautiful eyes fixed with a loving gaze upon

him. “‘In youth love shall mar him,’” he repeated to himself, regarding the pattern on the rich carpet on which they stood before the altar. “She is the daughter of a rich and noble lord, I the son of a poor knight, and her father is proud too.”

Bertha perceived that she had made an impression upon the youth.

“Fitzgerald,” she repeated, more tenderly than before, “I am sent to thee by one thy superior—one who is fair, one who is young and is courted, noble and wealthy.”

Fitzgerald’s heart beat like a sledge hammer, and, folding his arms, he stood motionless as a statue ; but there was a movement of his light moustache, which seemed to indicate a trembling of the lip.

“She loves you,” continued Bertha, in a

somewhat faltering voice. "Can you reciprocate her love?"

Fitzgerald looked at her, and she plainly saw love in the look. It rested on her for some time, and then turned on the bright armour.

"No!" said the esquire, bluntly, and in a voice so hoarse and trembling, that it was utterly unlike his own.

"She will die if you do not," said Bertha, turning pale, whilst a stern look of anger passed over her face, and she took his hand. She felt it tremble. It pressed hers firmly for a minute, whilst he looked at her again, sighed deeply, withdrew his hand, and stepping close to the altar, said, lowly and indistinctly—

"Leave me, most noble lady. I cannot

love you. You do me too much honour—arms have all my heart.”

“Insolent wretch!” cried Bertha, drawing herself up to her full height. “You cannot love *me*! I never asked your love for myself. Poor and meanly born boy, you have grossly insulted the Lady Bertha Bruce, and the insult shall not be forgotten!”

So saying the irate and flushed Bertha rushed from the chapel, regained her chamber, and throwing herself on her bed wept and meditated vengeance till dawn. The dawn, too, struggled through the stained glass windows of the chapel on the bewildered and astonished esquire.

It seemed to Fitzgerald as though he had seen a vision. He felt certain Bertha had spoken for *herself*, and it had cost him a hard struggle not to speak for *himself*; but he was

resolved "that love should not mar him," and had magnanimously conquered himself.

He continued standing before the altar, looking somewhat pale as the blue and green of the windows tinged his face, and the pangs of hunger raged within, and impatience began to seize him as the morning advanced and none came near him.

Hour after hour passed, and he gazed on the plain and polished suit of steel and the fair shield, which he intended should be marked with many a bruise and dent; and then he looked at the saints painted on the windows, and counted the roses in the carving, and thought of his future career, and the adventure of the night, and yawned with considerable weariness, and with difficulty kept his eyes open. And this state of things lasted all the morning, till noon.

At that hour the folding doors of the chapel were thrown open, and Fitzgerald looked joyfully towards it.

“The time is come,” he thought, and he felt glad at heart.

But no Lord Bruce, no ladies were there. A dozen archers ran into the church and rushed towards him. At their head was Lord Bruce’s son, Lord William, who had but lately returned from France, whither he had been sent for the purpose of finishing his education.

Lord William dashed upon Fitzgerald and struck him a back-handed blow across the mouth. The archers, despite his struggles, and after he had felled four or five of them, pinioned and gagged him, lifted him on their shoulders, and carried him from the chapel. A horse

was waiting in the courtyard; they placed him on it, tying his feet beneath its belly.

“This will teach you to dare again to talk of love to Lord Bruce’s daughter and my sister,” cried Lord William.

The lash was given to the horse, and it galloped over the drawbridge and left the castle amidst the laughter of the ungenerous, and the indignation of the generous portion of its inmates.

CHAPTER X.

FITZGERALD'S horse, or rather the horse on which he was tied, might, in truth, be called a sorry one. It was neither more nor less than a chestnut cart-horse, with a white face—a broken-down beast, that certainly did not carry him off as Mazeppa's steed bore him.

After the smart of the lash had subsided, the beast slackened his pace, and walked on very leisurely, and from time to time stopped

and cropped the grass, then again advanced a few paces, and at length, coming upon a spot where there was plenty of feed, made a dead halt, and in spite of the esquire's struggles, move it would not, but ate and ate, regardless of the scorching sun that poured down its hot rays on its hapless rider.

As Fitzgerald could do nothing with his horse, he began to reflect upon his apparently unhappy condition, and with no little mortification soliloquized :

"Where is my knighthood? Where are my spurs?" and in saying this he could not help laughing at his present position with regard to his horse, for had he had spurs he would have taught the animal a lesson of obedience. But the train of thought returned.

" 'Love has marred me,' I imagine, but not

as I judged the little god would. A plague on women! That haughty, but, I must acknowledge, beautiful Bertha, must have invented some scandalous tale against me. I have been grossly insulted—ignominiously ejected from the castle, like an ignoble felon, and what is worse, struck by Lord William as though I had been a lying groom. The tale will spread, told as they choose to tell it. I must have patience, for it will take a long list of noble deeds to blot out this foul indignity. How am I to get my knighthood? Oh, Bertha! Oh, woman!”

Many bitter reflections the unfortunate young man made on his sharp perch. The animal moved a few yards, now and then, and switched his stump of a tail.

“No honourable man would have done such an infernal deed,” thought Fitzgerald,

after many reflections had passed through his brain. "And such a well-born maiden to have so shamefully demeaned herself and so foully belied me! I never did her the slightest wrong by word or deed. I will have nothing to do with such a race. My father is right, they are beneath the thoughts of a man. Thus, too, to lose my long-expected knight-hood for a girl's false tales! I swear, by my honour, I will never think of women until the land rings with my name—perhaps not even then."

Fitzgerald thought the vow, his gag prevented his speaking it. However, the thought pleased his harassed mind, and he began to cast his ideas about for succour. This came, at length, in the shape of a sturdy countryman, who going up to him, was obliged to hold his sides, so boisterous was his laughter.

“Why, Squire Fitzgerald!” cried the man, so soon as he could repress his laughter, “who has put you in such a plight?”

The squire could not reply; but the man drawing forth from his wallet a huge knife, soon cut the cords, removed the gag, and young Thomas Fitzgerald jumped from his courser's ridge of a back.

He did not, however, think it desirable to tell the man how it happened that he came to be in such a plight, but heartily thanking his deliverer, and joining in his laugh, he entreated him to go to Lord Bruce's castle to inquire for one Stephen Stanley, the baron's secretary, and tell him he would, at any time that day or night, find a friend waiting for him at the “Hunter's Oak,” in the thick of the forest.

The countryman, like an honest fellow,

went direct to the castle, found the Baron's secretary, and returning to Fitzgerald, told him that Stephen Stanley would be at the "Oak" at sunset, and receiving a reward for his good services, wished the esquire good day, and left him to his sad reflections.

Now, Fitzgerald being nearly worn out with fasting, betook himself to a remote cottage among the hills, where, having devoured a tolerable amount of bread and cheese, and drank a sufficient quantity of ale to satisfy his thirst, he cast himself on the greensward, beneath a wide spreading tree, and forgot his worldly misery in sleep.

Oh! what a blessed thing that same sleep is—making all men equal whilst it lasts; but alas! it will end in an awakening, and so did Fitzgerald's.

The sun was sinking, and the youth set off,

strong and refreshed, for the forest, musing as he went, and avoiding habitations and roads till he reached the dark green trees, when threading his way among them, he proceeded straight to the "Hunter's Oak."

As he drew near he heard a voice singing, which he knew to be that of his friend Stanley, and as he entered the green space near the tree, he perceived him sitting at the foot of the oak in a reclining posture, with a large bundle supporting his shoulders, and another lying on the ground at his feet.

"You are merry, Stephen," said Fitzgerald, walking up to him.

"I am trying to sing down the birds to banish my cares," replied the youth, in an apparently sorry voice.

"Banish your cares!" repeated Fitzgerald.

"What may they be?"

“Come, sit down beside me and listen. There has been an awful row in the castle,” replied Stephen.

“What has caused it?”

“You, esquire love-maker.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Well, then, I must enlighten you.”

“Do.”

“The Baron’s eldest daughter, early this morning, as I was sitting in his apartment, reading a letter he could not decipher himself, burst open the door, her face pale, her eyes flashing like lightning, and flinging herself into his arms, sobbed and sighed as if her heart would break. She brought a pretty accusation against you, and took no more notice of my presence than if I had been an infant.”

“Brought an accusation against me!” cried

Fitzgerald, repeating Stephen's words—"what did she accuse me of doing?"

"Oh! Mr. Innocence!" laughed Stephen. "You know what arts you used to win her love."

"Win her love! What did she say?"

"That you had secretly won her heart, and had dared to speak to her of love, and that very morning had asked her to leave her rich home and wed you."

"False hearted woman!" cried Fitzgerald.

"At this point," continued Stephen, "she grew furious, and her father struck his knuckle on the table and swore to hang you for even looking at his daughter, and she, with revengeful looks and cruel tongue, called down vengeance on you."

"The hypocrite?" began Fitzgerald.

"Do not interrupt me, my good fellow,"

continued Stephen. "Just at that moment, Lord William, chancing to pass the door, came in, and after hearing Bertha's accusation, was, if possible, more furious against you than either her father or sister. The first thing they decided upon was that you should not be knighted ; and the rest you know already by what they have done to you ; and the proud tyrannical father and the maddened son swore not to rest till they had utterly ruined you, whilst the fascinating damsel said and did all that she could to urge them on."

"The whole accusation is utterly false," said Fitzgerald, with more calmness than would have been the case with most men, and he recounted to his friend Stephen all that had occurred, to the great amazement of the youth.

For many minutes after the recital they neither of them spoke, and each appeared to

be looking at the dark blue sky peeping through the green leaves.

“Well, Master Thomas,” said Stephen at length, “here is my bundle and there is yours. We have the world before us with youth and energy, and it shall go hard if we cannot win our way.”

“What do you mean, Stephen?”

“Just what I say. When I heard their dastardly and devilish intentions with regard to you, my hot blood got ever so much above fever heat. The moment I could leave the Baron I went straight to your room, packed up some of your property in your cloak, which I carried to my own apartment, and there I gathered together a few things I should want and made my bundle, and carried both outside the castle.

“Soon after, the Baron came from mass, for

he was very devout this morning. Well, I followed him into his lady's apartment, where his wife, his son, and both daughters were sitting. I was asked by the old tyrant what brought me into their presence, and I very politely told his dame, their son, and their daughters what I thought of them. As I went on I am ashamed to say my passion got the better of my judgment, and I so far forgot myself as to strike Lord Bruce. Lord William drew his sword and rushed at me. I had no sword. Our high words and loud voices had fortunately brought two or three men into the room, one of whom parried the blow. The men hustled me from one to the other, and whispered to me to fly. They were, fortunately, all my friends. They cried 'murder,' and as soon as I was safe out, 'keep the murderer out—draw up the bridge.' Well! when

I heard Lord Bruce storming and saw the bridge drawn up I made off to the place where I had hid my bundles, and there lay in ambush, expecting every minute to be pursued. Such not being the case I shouldered the two bundles, and here I am."

"I am both thankful and sorry that you perilled yourself for my sake," and taking his kind friend's hand, Fitzgerald shook it warmly, "but it is too late now, the deed is done, to do anything beyond getting away from our enemies as fast as we can."

"Good advice," said Stephen, with one of his pleasant smiles, "where do you propose going to, Mr. Knight, that was to have been?"

"To my father's Tower, where you will be heartily welcomed," said Fitzgerald; "we had better walk off at once."

"Walk! my dear lad, I am so tired with

dodging about all day, that I scarce know how to stand.”

He stretched out his well-made, but slender leg, by the side of Fitzgerald’s, and after looking at both, he laughingly said—

“They are not an equal match. The night is by no means damp. Let us sleep here to-night.”

“As you please,” said Fitzgerald. “But you will want some supper.”

“To be sure I shall;” and Stephen drew forth from his bundle some bread, a pie, and a bottle, and the two ate and drank, and talked over their fallen estate till the stars shone out, and then they betook themselves to sleep, lulled by the sighing of the green oak leaves.

Fitzgerald awoke soon after dawn, and beheld his friend, the ex-secretary, in a calm,

profound repose. Fitzgerald, knowing there was a stream close by, left his leafy bed-chamber, and went and had a bath, and on his return to their resting place, found Stanley still slumbering. He ate some of the pie, took a pull at the bottle, and when the sun was getting high, awoke the sleeping Stephen.

“What’s the matter?” cried Stephen, getting up into a sitting posture and rubbing his eyes.

“Not much; except that the sun is up, and we ought to be moving.”

“How long have you been awake?” asked Stephen.

“Some time. I have had a bath in the rivulet.”

“By Jove!” cried Stephen, “I must have one also.”

“Be quick,” said Fitzgerald, “for it’s a

good long day's journey to the old Tower, on a stout horse. We shall have to make two of it."

Stephen jumped up and ran towards the stream to take his bath, and after eating a tolerably hearty breakfast, they each took his pack and left the forest.

They avoided the main road, and walked through the bye-paths till they were many miles from the castle.

"It is my advice," said Stanley, "that we should make our way to France. That's the land of adventure. I have heard Lord William tell such tales about it."

"But I don't know a word of the language," said Fitzgerald.

"No matter. I know enough for both, and you will soon learn it. What do you say to my proposal?"

Fitzgerald did not answer for a moment or two.

“Shall we try the scheme?” again asked Stephen.

“Yes. I have often heard there is plenty to do in that land.”

Stephen walked on briskly for some time but after awhile slackened his pace, and by nightfall they had accomplished not more than half their journey, and he told his friend, he was incapable of proceeding further; therefore, seeing a house at some distance away from the road, they made their way to it forthwith.

This proved to be a farm-house. The inmates were just going to supper. The two travellers were made welcome—pressed to eat and drink. Stanley sang some of his best songs: won all the women’s hearts, whilst the

men gave theirs to the young esquire, and a full hour later than usual, the farmer sent his family to their beds and conducted his guests to their chamber.

“Thus ends our first day’s adventures,” said Stephen; “good night, friend Thomas.”

“Good night, and pleasant dreams;” returned the esquire.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next morning it became necessary to resume their journey. Fitzgerald was alert and rose with the dawn; but Stephen's eyes were closed till three hours after. It became, therefore, a case of need to awaken the drowsy youth, who, after having taken a hearty breakfast, sallied forth with his friend, to the great regret of the fair ones of the family, who watched his slight figure and snow-white feather till he was out of sight.

“ We have begun our adventure by faring well, Fitz.”

“ Yes,” returned the esquire.

“ What do you propose doing touching that blow on the mouth which Lord William favoured you with ?” asked Stephen.

“ Challenge him, when I am in such a position as to warrant his accepting my challenge,” said his companion.

“ And I make no doubt you will well punish the peacock.”

“ I will try.”

“ But, Fitz, we have much to do first. We must get into the service of some French lord. You, at first, as man-at-arms, and myself, I suppose as page.”

“ I suppose so.”

“ You will speedily, by your great deeds and handsome person, win the heart of the

lord and his beauteous daughter. One will knight you; the other wed you, and then you will kill Lord William at your leisure," laughed Stephen.

"And you, Master Stanley, what will you do?" said the esquire, with a smile.

"Oh! I suppose I must smile, and bow, and sing, and write my best; and then his Lordship will make me his secretary, and employ me on missions; and, who knows but that the King himself may envy my master his treasure, and fix me at his Court. Who can tell?"

"Not I," said the other with a smile. "Stephen, my lad, you must wed the daughter. Neither love nor wife for me for many and many a long year."

"Well, I can't object to that," cried Stephen, laughing, "only take care that your

acts bear out your words. I very much doubt if they will—that's all."

"I will see to that, my lad. Sing us a song to march to."

Stephen was in no way loth, and he sang a merry song to the notes of which they marched on bravely, and after some four hours' trudge, sat down, and did ample justice to all the good things the farmer's daughters had provided for them.

After this refreshment, having selected a pleasant spot, and the journey being more than half over, Stanley must needs stretch himself on the green sward, declaring that the trees formed a cool canopy, and the moss an exceedingly soft bed, and the birds were singing a lovely song, and the pie and ale engendered an enchanting drowsiness, and so sleep awhile he must.

“ You are always sleeping.”

“ Am I ?”

“ Yes.”

“ And you are ever waking and walking. My legs need rest; so, Fitz, my man, bide here awhile; or, if you will, walk off, and I will follow as soon as I have finished my sleep; only tell me the way, and look out for me towards the evening.”

“ Well, Stephen, I will take you at your word, for I am anxious to see my father. Let your way be straight on till you come to the village at the foot of the downs. Any brat there will tell you the path to the old Tower.”

So saying, Fitzgerald left his friend to enjoy his sleep, which he did, as well as many pleasant fancies in his dream.

On and on walked the esquire, and in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, his thoughts

were not merry ; but he kept them as much as he could on the future, and strove hard to forget the past.

“ I fear love has marred me all he can,” he thought. “ War—war, that shall make me. I have thought sometimes that my father’s vision was something more than a dream, and even now I know not what to conclude.”

On he trudged through the heat and dust, as straight as a dart, as strong as a lion, as noble as a king, in spite of both heat and dust. He passed the village and began to enter among his well remembered native downs. Their rounded sides, some standing out in light, others shrouded in shade, were well remembered, and the deep depression of some among them, looking as though a giant had pressed his thumb upon them, as we

might on a piece of putty, looked dark and soft. He began to ascend, and in another hour hoped again to meet his beloved father ; and, at the thought, his heart became glad, for upwards of two years had passed since they had parted, and Fitzgerald dearly loved his parent.

Well, on he walked, and as he ascended the slippery turf, he saw a shepherd driving his flock down the hill-side, and as they met, Fitzgerald at once recognised the man as one he had known as long as he could remember anything.

“ How does the world wag with you, Geoffrey ?” he said, “ and how is my father, quite well ?”

“ Upon my life it's Master Fitzgerald, grown past all knowledge,” returned the shepherd resting on his crook, whilst the

sheep stood still and looked about them, the dog keeping watch.

The shepherd did not reply to Fitzgerald's question. He shook his head, and then, after scratching it, said—

“Master Thomas, you was always a man from your birth, and men can bear most things, so it's no use beating about the bush, or mincing matters with you.”

“What is it?” asked the youth.

Last night a body of horsemen passed through our village and took their way over the downs. My boy was out all night after a stray sheep, and saw them reach Sir James's Tower. They battered at the gate, and it would not give way. The boy hid to watch their works. Well, Master Thomas, they set fire to the strong door, and after it

had burnt some time, in they all rushed ; and there they be still, your poor father and all his people hanging lifeless over the wall. I seed them with my own eyes. Don't be down-hearted, we must all die some time or other."

"Who are the wretches?" asked the youth.

"They belong to Lord Bruce."

"To Lord Bruce!" repeated Fitzgerald.

"Yes."

"And they are still in the old Tower?" said the esquire.

"Yes."

"Do you know who has command of the party?"

"I heard, but I can't say for certain, the one in command was Lord Bruce's son, Lord William."

"Can you tell me what number of men are in the Tower?"

"Some of them have been down in the village, and I have heard one of them say as how they mustered about fifty."

"About fifty?" said Fitzgerald.

"Yes, so the man said."

Without speaking another word, Fitzgerald darted off like an arrow, and did not stop till he reached the defile in which the old Tower stood. Then cautiously drawing nigh, he indeed beheld his father and his few people, in all but six, hanging over the battlements in the glaring sunlight. Sir James's face was covered with blood; one of his hands—the right—was cut off, and his bare breast bore evidence of two deep thrusts. The rest, even to poor old Cecil, all shewed marks of having sold their lives dearly.

Fitzgerald's eyes stared vacantly on the sight before him. His face was pale as death,

his teeth were firmly closed, and he trembled in every limb.

“One day I will make the tyrants rue their cruelty,” he said. “My poor father is no longer alive to punish the miscreants; but his son will never rest till he has fully avenged the foul deed.”

He turned away from the sickening sight, and to his astonishment, John Singleton, the man who had aided Stephen Stanley's escape, stood beside him.

“This is a very serious business, master. I take God to witness I had no hand in it. There were but twenty among us who were so cursed cruel. We were forced to ride where my lord bade us; but the twenty who carried out the barbarous orders, were envious villains, who hated you for your kindness of heart and great courage. It was Lord William who

killed the poor old man, your father ; and the Tower and lands are to be his. I am determined never to enter the Tower or the Castle again after this night. I'll seek my fortune elsewhere, or starve."

There was a silence of some minutes, and John Singleton again spoke.

"Maybe, squire, you would like to bury your dead father?"

"I should," said Fitzgerald.

"I shall have the watch to-night, and if you'll come when it is pitch dark, I'll cut the rope, and let his body drop to the ground."

"I will, John ; and may God bless you !" and pressing Singleton's hand, Fitzgerald returned in search of his friend Stephen.

Fitzgerald's heart was very sad, his usually bright eyes were dim, and his step rapid and wild. The light breeze blowing over the

downs and around his temples was unfelt. He ran down the steep hill-side and through the huts, forming a sort of village, and along the road for a considerable distance, when he heard Stephen's clear and beautiful voice trilling a merry song, and presently saw him sauntering leisurely along.

"Why, Fitz, my man, what brings you back? I thought you were safe in the Tower. How pale you look. Are you mad? or have you seen a ghost at this time of day?"

"I have seen my murdered father hanging over the battlements of his own Tower."

"Your father murdered?"

"Yes."

"And his body hanging over the battlements of his own Tower?"

"Just so."

"Who was the murderer?"

“ Lord William assailed it last night with some fifty men, and butchered my father in his little garrison.”

“ The horrible devil !” said Stanley ; “ such implacable vengeance for an imagined affront ! Poor Thomas ! What will you do ? I wish I could punish the mean, the contemptible villain, as he deserves.”

“ Leave that to me, Stephen. The time will come, sooner or later, when right will triumph. My present task is grievous. I must bury my poor father.”

“ How will you get possession of his body ?” asked Stephen.

“ John Singleton has promised to aid me,” replied Fitzgerald.

“ John Singleton ! and did he form one of the murderous band ?” cried Stephen, in great surprise.

“He was obliged to obey Lord Bruce’s command to make one of the party ; but he would take no part whatever in the murderous attack.”

“I am glad of that, for I know he has always been much attached to us both.”

“Yes, and he intends quitting the baron’s service for ever.”

“He is quite right,” said Stephen.

From one of the country people Fitzgerald borrowed a spade and a pickaxe, and taking his cloak, in which Stephen had packed his worldly goods, when the night was thoroughly dark, he, with his friend Stephen, took the well-known way to the Tower.

Fitzgerald did not utter a word, and Stephen, respecting his silence and his grief, was equally taciturn, though it must be confessed silence was not his *forte*.

When they reached the Tower, lights were shining from the narrow windows. Fitzgerald drew his friend away, and led him to a small wood that covered one side of the down. He entered the wood and was followed by Stephen. The esquire stopped suddenly.

“I will dig his grave here,” he said, and his voice was hollow and faint.

“I will help you,” said Stanley, taking the spade.

The ground was soft from late rains, and a deep, wide grave was soon made. They returned silently to the Tower. The lights were no longer to be seen. All was still. Fitzgerald whistled very softly. A weight fell heavily, and with a dull sound, near him. He rushed towards it, and took the cold dead body of his father in his arms. The poor old knight had been surprised in his bed

by his assailants, and his corpse was unclothed.

The son needed no help, but walked towards the wood with his heavy burden. As they drew near the place where the grave had been dug, the moon began to shine, large and red above the tops of the trees. Fitzgerald put down his load, and by the dim light agitatedly surveyed the many wounds in his father's body.

"My right hand," he said to himself, "shall take ample vengeance for this cruelty. Lord William's hand must be lopped away. It struck me, and mercilessly slew my father."

Stanley looked on his friend's face. The expression was troubled, but firm. There was neither rage nor malice displayed; nothing but deep grief and manly resolution. He took his cloak from Stephen, and wrapping

the body therein, carried it to the grave, and as he laid it in, a faint light shone on the pale and bloody face. Fitzgerald turned away, whilst Stephen shovelled in the earth. The superabundant earth was dispersed about, so that no marks of a grave might be seen.

“Stephen, I thank you, from my soul, for all your good services,” said Fitzgerald. “I shall never forget them. Let us be going. I know the spot well. I will come in brighter days and give my father a more befitting tomb.”

The young men departed together, both alike friendless and landless. They rested that night at the shepherd’s hut.

“I have an old grandmother in London,” said Stephen, as they prepared for their journey on the following day, “and I would fain see her before I leave England. She is old

and feeble, and in all probability after this we shall never meet again."

"Then let us go to London, by all means," said Fitzgerald, "we shall then be better able to decide upon our plans."

To London they trudged, and to the old grandmother's they went. As Stephen had said, she was old and feeble, but she received her grandson kindly and affectionately, and welcomed Fitzgerald heartily.

After a few days' sojourn with his grandmother, Stephen and his friend, having settled all their plans, the former said to his relation—

"Granny, I am sorry we must part so soon. Fitzgerald is anxious to get out of England."

"But why need you go?" she asked.

“Because I have promised my friend I will accompany him.”

“Then I will say no more.”

Two days after the above conversation with his grandmother, Stephen and Fitzgerald bade the old lady good-bye.

“Farewell, Stephen,” she said, as they were about to depart, “farewell, dear boy. Take this purse. I shall never see you more,” and the old lady’s tears began to flow.

“Don’t say so, dear granny,” said Stephen, cheerily. “I will come to you next Christmas, and drink a cup of metheglin by your fire-side.”

The allies took ship and sailed in safety to the French coast.

CHAPTER XII.

ARRIVED in the pleasant country of France, they set out in quest of a castle containing some lord who might be of use to them and they to him. They travelled all day and a very long distance. Night had overtaken them, for night travelled faster than they; but still on and on they went, through the darkness, Stephen singing, and Fitzgerald striding on without speaking.

A light summer rain began to fall coolingly

upon them, and to lay the dust that had helped to weary them. Still on they went, hungry and tired, and at length Stephen, who had left off singing for some time spoke.

“I tell you what, Fitz, I must give up the ghost. I positively cannot trudge a single step further.”

“Come try,” said his friend “lean on my arm—come.”

“Lean on your arm: what make you as tired as I am myself?” said the youth smiling.

“Never mind tiring me, my lad,” said Fitzgerald, presenting his arm to his friend.

Stephen, laughing, leant on the esquire’s stone-like, strong arm, and taking off his cap to let the rain fall on his head, started off again.

Presently lights appeared at no great distance before them.

“Hurrah!” shouted Fitzgerald, and they quickened their steps, and mounted a somewhat steep hill, on which was perched a huge castle, from which the pleasant lights glimmered.

As they drew near, a sharp voice called out amidst a clank of arms—

“*Qui va là?*”

“Curse the fellow, what does he say?” asked Fitzgerald.

“*Etrangers, mais amis,*” returned Stephen, and added to his companion, “he asks who goes there; that’s all.”

“Then why the devil don’t he say so in plain English at once.”

Stephen laughed, saying—

“If you mean to get on in this country, Master Thomas, you must suppress your En-

glish feelings. These people don't comprehend them any more than your words."

"True—I will," said Fitzgerald, and by this time four men stood around them. They were each seized by two of the Frenchmen and led to the castle gate. At their word the bridge was lowered, and in a few minutes the youths were conducted into a large hall, brilliantly lighted, where the lord and a merry party were sitting after supper, talking, drinking wine, and listening to ballads sung by several minstrels.

The lord of the castle was a somewhat corpulent, tall, swarthy man, with a pair of twinkling, black eyes, a coal-black beard, and a turned up nose. He had a complacent, happy, but rather conceited appearance ; yet he looked exceedingly bland, and anything but repulsive.

To him the two youths were led, and Stanley, bowing and putting on his best air, recounted their history, and expressed their willingness to enter his service if he would honour them with his patronage.

Stephen made a good impression, especially on a dark-eyed young girl, somewhat like Stephen himself, with the same lively mien, brown face and pearl white teeth, who entreated the lord of the castle to take the young men at once into his pay.

“Peace, my child !” said a handsome, good natured looking lady, splendidly attired.

“Do you favour Englishmen, beautiful Marie ?” asked a spruce young knight, leaning over the table to ask the question, and looking tenderly at her.

Marie made no reply, and the Seigneur

Briffault, her father, said, addressing himself to Stephen—

“Come, young Englishman, say in what way you think you and that stout young gentleman can serve me?”

“My friend, my lord, can serve with his strong arm and sword: I with my heart and pen,” said Stephen.

He bowed gracefully, and Marie said—

“He is charming, father!”

“Peace, my child,” said her mamma.

“What’s it all about, Stephen?” asked his friend, who was standing very upright, and looking the *beau idéal* of a young English warrior.

Stanley could not reply, for De Briffault spoke, saying—

“I must have a sample of the talents of both.

If your friend will serve me for a time as a man-at-arms, I warrant he will forget his troubles and gain his spurs; and as for you, thou art a rogue if ye deceive me, for to tell the truth I am somewhat prepossessed in your favour."

"And so am I, father," said Marie.

"Peace, my child," again responded the splendidly dressed lady, her mother.

Stephen interpreted to his friend all that had been said.

"Tell him," said Fitzgerald, "I am ready at this moment to wrestle, leap, fight with any one here," and the esquire drew himself up to his full height and looked quietly and coolly about him.

This being explained, "*Diable!*" resounded from many mouths, and all were forced to express their admiration of the noble

young Englishman ; Marie adding to her praises—

“ But I love the small one, he is so gentle and good looking.”

The youths were provided with food and conducted to their chambers, and Marie de Briffault having talked a great deal about the charming “ *Monsieur Stanley*,” retired to hers also.

Next morning Fitzgerald was up early, all impatience to give the Frenchmen a specimen of his skill.

Stephen had given such a glowing description of his friend’s prowess, that all the inhabitants of the immense castle were drawn out to witness it. Fitzgerald stood calm and modestly at one end of the tilting-yard, awaiting to do whatever De Briffault required.

First, they brought him a fiend of a steed, which only two days before had killed an expert groom, and Fitzgerald mounting, so managed him, as to draw down shouts of applause from the excited and astonished Frenchmen.

Next he tilted with several knights, and picked them all neatly out of their saddles. He wrestled with "Big Alphonse," the Hercules of the castle, and, after a tough battle, laid him sprawling on the flat of his back, amidst shouts of laughter and applause ; but "Big Alphonse" in a rage seized him by the legs and pulled him down, which added to the merriment, and Fitzgerald laughed heartily too, which won him still greater favour.

Next he encountered several adversaries with differently fashioned swords, and defeated them all, to the admiration of the lookers on ; but his shooting, which came last, caused

such thunders of applause, that Fitzgerald who had “gone through his performances” with his usual taciturnity, turned to Stanley and said—

“What a devil’s noise these frog-eating Frenchmen make !”

Stephen was commanded to interpret the champion’s words ; so he was forced to invent a compliment, which was pronounced very good for such a cold mortal as the young man seemed to be.

The result of all this success was that “*Monsieur Fitzgerald*” was admitted as one of De Briffault’s esquires ; informed that the said De Briffault was at war with a certain Baron de Liancourt, who might show them sport ; was equipped in De Briffault’s colours, which were yellow, and was recommended to learn French with all possible expedition.

As for Stephen Stanley, De Briffault appointed him to no particular office, but kept him about his person as his own gentleman, to do whatsoever and go wherever he might need. So Master Stephen had a very merry and an easy life, and that was what he most appreciated.

As had been predicted, De Liancourt shewed them sport, much to Fitzgerald's delight. They had many skirmishes, and although the Englishman was but young, and only an esquire, he was more than once entrusted with the command of a small corps, acquitting himself like a true man and always returning victorious.

Fitzgerald contrived to learn an exceedingly odd jargon, which passed for French, and by which he made himself understood, and in which he gave his commands. Now this jargon drew forth many a laugh from the

Frenchmen as well as from the Englishman himself, who, in spite of his friend Stephen's assistance, could never contrive to speak otherwise.

A year passed by, and De Briffault talked to Fitzgerald of his knighthood, and Stephen talked to De Briffault's daughter, Marie, of many charming things: and Fitzgerald listened to De Briffault with a pleased and respectful demeanour, and Marie listened to Stephen with a pleased, and, we are bound to say, with a somewhat tender air.

Fitzgerald had a secret, which he intended to make known to De Briffault in time of need; a discovery of his own, which, however, he would speak of to none of the inmates of the castle; for French tongues, although agreeable, are not safe, and will talk of what the ears hear.

Fitzgerald's apartment was on the ground floor of one of the towers, situated at an angle of the walls. It was boarded with a dark wood; the planks were ill-fitting, and creaked as if they felt themselves aggrieved when trod upon.

Fitzgerald had a dog, as most Englishmen have, and this animal, one day, caught his claw between the planks, and, howling, drew his master's attention to his situation who, stooping down, proceeded forthwith to liberate his dog, and, in doing which, he thought he perceived the plank to be quite loose. This causing him to search further, he discovered that plank to be shorter than its fellows, and wider too, being nearly square.

Fitzgerald turned out his dog, locked his door, and taking a piece of flat iron, forthwith inserted it between the boards, and, after a

few efforts, raised the square plank. On further and more minute examination, he perceived, about a foot beneath the plank he had removed, a similar one, in which was inserted an iron ring. This the esquire took in his hand and raised the plank, and beneath him he beheld a dark hole. Taking a pike from a corner of his apartment, he began to sound the cavity and found it to be about four or five feet deep.

“Well and good,” thought he. “I will proceed no further to night,” and he immediately closed his discovery.

In the course of the evening he asked De Briffault, amongst other things, if there were any other means of entrance to the castle save the great gates.

“No, my lad,” replied he. “I am happy to say there is not ; and it’s all the better, and

safer and more snug. I do not like too many holes. Why, what makes you ask?"

"Oh!" drawled Fitzgerald, "only because I wished to know."

"I have this day received tidings," said De Briffault, stroking his beard, "that De Liancourt means to besiege us here."

"Well!" said the esquire, rubbing his hands with great and evident pleasure, "we will soon cause him to retreat. Give me a handful of men to make a sortie, and de Liancourt shall be instantly driven from his position."

"We shall see," said De Briffault, who did not relish the idea of being cooped up in his castle.

"But, surely," said the esquire, "it would be far better to take a strong party to intercept and route De Liancourt."

Fitzgerald was most anxious to lead such a party; he knew every inch of ground.

“No, *mon brave*,” said De Briffault, “I object to the scheme.”

Still, De Briffault knew his esquire was right, and that though young, he was the best man to be entrusted with the command of such an expedition. The fact was, De Briffault enjoyed the luxuries of good eating and drinking better than fighting; so all he did was to give orders for an extra watch to be set, his castle gate to be kept shut, drawbridge up, and portcullis down, to prevent any sudden surprise.

After retiring for the night, and when all was quiet in the castle, Fitzgerald again raised the boards in his chamber, and having provided himself with a good torch, he lighted it and jumped into the hole. It was low and

narrow with an arch opening at one end, through which, having crept on his hands and knees, he was able to stand upright at the top of a flight of nearly a score of stone steps, Having descended these, he stood in a narrow passage, hardly wide enough to admit a very stout person to traverse ; it was arched and walled somewhat rudely, but strongly. He went forward and, after walking for nearly ten minntes, the air felt somewhat stifling and unwholesome, wherefore he ran with all his speed, and in five minutes more felt a more congenial atmosphere for his lungs. A few more minutes, and the night air blew upon him. He had arrived at the end of the subterranean passage, and, looking up, saw the sky and the stars through an opening high above him.

As far as he was able to discover, there

were no steps leading to this opening. It was to be gained by climbing the rocky side of the hole. This Fitzgerald, after sticking his torch in the ground, proceeded to do, and with some little labour he reached the opening and found himself in the midst of rocks which overhung the aperture so as completely to conceal it from all but those who might know of its existence.

After spending a considerable time in endeavouring to discover an outlet, Fitzgerald perceived an opening between two rocks just beneath him, and squeezing himself through the narrow space, lacerating his hand and knocking the skin off one of his ankles, evils which would have been insupportable to a modern "dandy," he slipped and rolled over and over to the bottom of a steep bank, ending his descent in a tolerably deep stream at the

bottom of it. He sank, but Fitzgerald had been too accustomed to water not to rise again, and he struck out vigorously and soon reached the opposite side of the stream, and the next minute was standing on the bank dripping wet. He began to look about him as well as he could in the darkness.

Fortunately for the esquire, at this juncture the moon shone out and showed him where he was. He immediately recognised the spot. He was about an hour's walk from the castle, and he distinctly saw before him the rocky precipice which formed one extremity of the hill on which it stood, and on which the underground passage opened.

Having completely satisfied himself in every particular as to the exact locality, he was about to take to the water again, when

his arm was seized from behind, and turning quickly, he saw two men, and at a glance perceived by their dress they were two of De Liancourt's men-at-arms.

It happened that the high road was somewhere about three hundred yards from where they were, and the sound of tramping men and horses' hoofs struck on the esquire's ear but somewhat faintly, and at a much greater distance.

Without ceremony, Fitzgerald applied a vigorous English blow on the nose of the man who held his arm, by which he knocked him into the stream and there ended his worldly cares and worldly pleasures. Drawing his sword, he turned upon the other man, who, having witnessed the fate of his companion, dropped on his knees and begged for mercy, and, without

being asked, informed his captor that the Lord de Liancourt was on the road to besiege the large castle about a mile distant.

“Oh ! oh !” thought Fitzgerald. “I have not found out the secret passage a moment too soon.”

He took the trembling man by the collar and led him to a tree, and what between cuffs, signs, and broken French, he gave him to understand that if he attempted to cry out he would hang him from one of the branches. Then, taking off his girdle, he tied his legs together, and with his own belt pinioned his arms, and tying a kerchief over his mouth, put him on his face, so that he was unable to see, leaving this man thus situated, he plunged into the stream, and on getting to the opposite side, mounted the bank and sought the opening in the rock leading to the

underground passage. This was not so easily accomplished as he had expected, as there were many similar openings, and it was not till after an anxious search of nearly three hours that the true one could be found.

Fitzgerald retraced his steps with as little loss of time as possible, and regained his room. His first act was to close the opening to the stairs, and then, without waiting to change his clothes, sought the walls. There he found only bustle, and to some extent confusion ; for all around the castle was to be seen De Liancourt's force.

Owing to the length of time occupied in finding out the opening in the rock leading to the underground passage, Fitzgerald was prevented giving De Briffault timely notice of the approach of his enemy close to the very walls of his castle.

Fitzgerald went to every part of the castle walls to satisfy himself that there was no vulnerable point for the enemy to attack.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE can imagine but few things more disagreeable than for a gentleman to be besieged in his own house. He would have difficulty in knowing how to "kill time."

So thought De Briffault.

Fitzgerald, on the contrary, quite appreciated the position, for the earnest and ardent wish of his heart was to sally forth boldly, and scatter De Liancourt's force to the winds.

This plan, however, De Briffault did not

relish, and all poor Fitzgerald's bad French and good reasons were lost upon him. The esquire would watch the enemy from the walls. He looked upon De Liancourt's splendid tent and the barricade of carts and waggons his men had made. He saw the bright arms of the sentries, heard the sounds of the trumpets, the laughing and the merriment, cursed the abundant stock of provisions with which De Briffault had taken the precaution to store his castle, which constituted his great happiness in life, and longed to come in contact with De Liancourt's men.

"There is the underground passage," he thought, as he stood on one of the towers, with his hands behind him, *à la* Napoleon the First, and his cap pulled over his eyes as he knit his brows beneath the brilliant rays of the sun and surveyed the enemy. "One

might do something that way ; but crawling like moles should be a last resource, when we fight like men.

“ Hang these frogs, they can caper and chatter, and that’s all they can do. I wish old fat De Briffault would let me settle his enemy for him,” and the esquire compressed his lips, and jerked his head on one side with a vexed and determined air. His lips were inactive for a minute or two, but then continued—

“ Here he’ll stay shut up till the food is all gone, the people starved to melancholy and weakness, and then he’ll patch up a talking bargain instead of fighting ; or possibly, if he can induce his men to sally out, get well beaten for his pains ; a termination which he will richly deserve.”

As Fitzgerald had imagined, so, after a

fashion, it turned out. He did his best to induce De Briffault to make a sally, but he would not hear of it; and the people went on eating and drinking, and, to Fitzgerald's question modestly put, as to what was to be the end of the affair, he could only obtain after a series of grunts—

“*Nous verrons.*”

This state of things had lasted some days, when one evening as Stephen Stanley, de Briffault, and Fitzgerald were talking together, Stephen said—

“I think we shall soon be getting to the end of the stock of provisions.”

“Well, so much the better,” said Fitzgerald in English.

“What does he say?” asked De Briffault with something like anxiety.

“That he agrees with me.”

“What is best to be done,” said the fat De Briffault.

“Sally out and drive De Liancourt and his men from their position before the castle walls.”

“No, no,” said De Briffault, “that will not be desirable.”

“Then De Liancourt will starve the whole garrison.”

“What do you think of sending a herald and some one to enter into negotiation with the enemy?” asked Stephen.

“A capital idea!” cried De Briffault.

“A dastardly one,” added Fitzgerald.

“It may save many lives,” said Stephen.

“No doubt,” cried De Briffault, “and a herald shall go forth.”

“And will you go with him to enter upon the negotiation?” asked Fitzgerald.

“No, *mon brave*.”

"Then to whom will you trust the important matter?" asked the esquire.

"To Stanley, and—"

"And—" commenced Stephen.

"And your gallant friend," added De Briffault. "What say you, *mon brave*?"

Fitzgerald was silent for a minute, and then said gleefully—

"I think Stephen has suggested wisely, and I am quite ready to go with him. But—"

"But what?" asked De Briffault.

"But I had much rather fight than parley."

"Well," said Stephen laughing, "parley first and fight afterwards."

The following morning Stephen Stanley was sent forth with a herald, and Fitzgerald, to see what terms could be made with the enemy. Accordingly the gate was opened, and the three descended the steep; then the

herald, a dapper young fellow, carrying De Briffault's arms on his back and breast, went forward alone, and blowing a trumpet drew towards him some half dozen or more of the enemy.

"By George! look at them, Stephen," said his friend; "they throw their arms and legs about like flails. I should like to thrash them. Look! the herald's going off with them."

"Well," said Stephen, "we will wait for them here. Come, sit down," and he threw himself on the turf and began singing, in his merry, clear voice—

'Marie, dear,
I'm very queer—
My heart throbs all for thee.
Marie, dear,
I'm very queer—
Oh, keep your heart for me.'

"I say, Stanley, do leave off singing your love-sick nonsense, and tell me what you are

to say to this frog-eating De Liancourt, or whatever he is called."

"Why, my friend Thomas, I am to use my own discretion—"

"Your discretion!" interrupted the esquire, with a smile.

"Yes, my own discretion," continued Stephen, also smiling, "and shall treat as I find needful, leaving, of course, the power of concluding the said treaty to our corpulent friend in the castle."

'Marie, dear,
I'm very—'

"Then," said Fitzgerald again, interrupting his love ditty, "insult this De Liancourt, and use all your skill to bring the matter to a fighting issue. Where is the good of palaver-ing when one can fight."

"Ah, now I see why you came so readily

into my suggestion of negotiation," said Stephen.

"Well, I could see no better way of settling the matter."

"Yes, negotiation is better than fighting, isn't it Fitz?"

"If by negotiation you can irritate De Liancourt, so as to prevent an amicable ending."

Stephen laughed, but made no reply, recommenced his love ditty, which he went on singing, whilst his friend surveyed the camp and ruminated on fights and surprisals.

"Yonder comes the herald, Stephen. Come along, and bear in mind, my lad, I'm for fighting and little talking."

"What a fire-eating, intemperate youth you are," said Stephen, getting on his legs; "you'll know better one of these odd days."

“Perhaps so,” responded Fitzgerald, in a doubtful tone.

A knight and several esquires led the party to De Liancourt’s tent, around which stood several guards on duty, very smartly caparisoned. The interior of the tent was lined with crimson cloth—and there sat de Briffault’s enemy, in a large arm-chair, looking exceedingly out of temper, the herald’s arrival having aroused him from his daily after-dinner sleep, for which interruption the esquire and page, who had been so rash as to make it, had been respectively abused, and, indeed, knocked down by their gentle master.

After profound salutations on the part of Stephen, and an inclination of Fitzgerald’s head, respectful, but dignified, Stanley began by informing De Liancourt that he came to

treat with him, whereupon De Liancourt made answer, in a harsh voice—

“Then, young man, go back to your fat lord and tell him I did not come here for the purpose of treating, and that it is my determination to remain till I starve him so thin that he will scarcely be able to recognise his big, burly person the next time he looks into the polished surface of his shield.”

“But, my lord, will you not listen for a moment to what I have to say, and on what terms—”

“Terms!” roared out De Liancourt.

“Yes, terms,” went on Stephen. “What sum of money you will take.”

“Money!” repeated De Liancourt, angrily rubbing his head. “Go, young man, and tell your master, De Liancourt despises both

him and his money. I don't play at buying and selling. So, now gentlemen, the sooner you take your departure the better. Here," he called out to one of his esquires, "re-conduct these gentlemen without the camp."

Once more Stanley made an attempt to remonstrate in his most courteous manner, but the only effect it had on De Liancourt was, to make him roar madly for his guards to conduct them to the castle without loss of time.

Fitzgerald, highly delighted at the turn the negotiation had taken, seized Stephen by the arm, saying—

"Don't be a fool, Stephen ; we'll talk to him soon in a different strain," and turning to the already irate lord, said, with a familiar nod of the head—

"Adieu, *Moosho*, we'll come and battle with you next time."

Without further delay, Stephen, Fitzgerald and the herald were conducted from the tent, and speedily regained the castle.

De Briffault, on being told the issue of the negotiation, looked very much crest-fallen and disappointed.

Fitzgerald retired to his own room, but with a different feeling to that which animated De Briffault. He contemplated, from his observations taken during the short time he had passed in the enemy's camp, that it would be no very difficult matter, seeing the security in which the besiegers seemed to dwell, and the scornful confidence of their demeanour, to surprise them by means of the underground passage.

Having, in his own mind, determined his plan of attack; thought of and found answers for every objection De Briffault might raise,

the sanguine Fitzgerald went in search of his friend Stephen, through whom he might communicate his plan to De Briffault.

The esquire's search for his ally was not very successful, for nowhere was the youth to be found.

"Where in the devil's name can he be?" thought the esquire, and seeing a small page close by, who was teaching a dog to stand on its hind legs and shoulder a stick pike-wise, he cried—

"*Ici, Master Francois.*"

"*Plait-il?*" said the boy, turning his head, while the dog dropped his fore paws for an instant to the ground, and then stood up again.

"*Où est Stanley ?*"

The boy informed him that he was engaged with the ladies.

“Run, my lad, and tell him to come without loss of time to me.”

“But the dog.”

“I will see he does not run away, and I’ll teach him to handle the pike,” said the esquire, good naturedly, and much to the satisfaction of the page.

In less than five minutes the little fellow returned and informed Fitzgerald, Monsieur Stanley would be with him in a few minutes, which few minutes his friend knew by past experience, might be an hour or even more ; so with exemplary patience he walked about the court-yard to and fro, silent and unmurmuring, but full of thought.

“Well, what’s in the wind now, Master Thomas Fitzgerald,” said Stephen, skipping towards him. “Marie is most charming. I

shall win her now I am certain. Come, my lad, leave off slaying people in what you call fair fight, and follow my example—make love. There's no happiness in life at all equal to it. Oh! those beautiful eyes of my charming Marie! You have nothing to divert you, save learning the most approved method of manslaying; be advised, my dear Fitz, and take to love making. What on earth is the use of being a knight if you haven't a lady as well. Love sighs are pleasing. Come, try love, Fitzgerald, and chose a lady like my beautiful Marie. That is if you can find one as beautiful."

"Time enough for that," said the esquire, "I don't want ladies now; your French tongue will be much more useful to me at this moment."

"My French tongue?"

“Yes. I want you to talk to De Briffault. The man has no more idea of defence than a child.”

“Well, and what am I to say? Set my intended father-in-law on to make a sortie and be killed, when he can remain quietly within his castle and live?”

“Not exactly: but come with me, if you can spare the time from your beautiful Marie! Love must be as intoxicating as wine.”

“A deuced deal more,” said Stephen. “I wish you would try it.”

So saying, they went in search of the lord of the castle, Stanley humming a love ditty, and Fitzgerald hoping within himself to do a deed that might gain him knighthood.

“For,” argued he, “I am full old to be without my spurs.”

De Briffault was in his bed-chamber, lying

on the flat of his back, indenting the velvet coverlet of the bed, and endeavouring to keep off the troublesome flies by the aid of a large feather fan. He was turning over in his mind sundry projects touching his present position. A sally he abhorred—treaties De Liancourt scornfully rejected.

“What am I to do?” he said to himself, despairingly. “Men will eat, and provisions will not last for ever.”

“*Diable !*” grunted the corpulent lord, as he whisked off a whole legion of flies; then wished himself a monk, or an old woman, or anything rather than a *puissant seigneur*. Again he closed his eyes and grunted. Buzz—buzz! again sounded in his ears, and a whole corps of flies promenaded on his fat nose, his cheeks, and his forehead.

“*Diable !*” he roared, using his hand and

his fan, and off flew the flies. He puzzled his brain to invent a plan for his relief in his present emergency ; but his brain not being accustomed to be called upon so suddenly, refused to give him the aid he required.

He grew more and more confused, and fought the flies more vigorously in his despair, and at length he resolved on going to sleep for the present and thinking afterwards.

Just at that critical moment came a rap at the door.

“ *Diable !* who’s there ? ”

A second knock.

“ *Diable !* Come in. ”

“ Oh, it’s you, Stephen. ”

“ Yes. ”

“ What do you want ? ”

“ To tell you that Fitzgerald has something of importance to communicate, ” said Stephen.

“Something of—curse the flies!” cried De Briffault, fanning off a troop. “Something of importance! What is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Can’t he wait till I have finished my nap—that is to say if these cursed flies will let me sleep.”

“I should say not.”

“Why do you say so, if you don’t know what is the nature of the business he wants to communicate.”

“Because he appears very anxious to see you at once.”

“Where is he?”

“In the next room.”

“Call him in. I will hear him, and sleep afterwards.”

De Briffault sat bolt upright in the bed, his doublet all unbuttoned, his double chin hang-

ing almost on his breast—the living image of a fat Chinese deity in a pagoda.

“Now, Stephen, look sharp,” said Fitzgerald; “ask him if he will allow us to make a sortie.”

“*Sortie!*” said De Briffault, catching the word; “no, I will not permit a sortie. *Diable!* I hate a sortie.”

The fat lord puffed and blowed like a grampus, vowed it was hot and suffocating, and bade them leave him in peace, swearing that not a soul should leave the castle.

“Tell him,” said the esquire, when De Briffault had puffed and stormed to his heart’s content, “that if he will give me thirty-five or forty men, I will engage to rout De Liancourt, without opening his gates.”

Stephen having interpreted this apparently impudent boast, De Briffault lifted his eye-

brows in an extraordinary manner, and expressed his doubts in a guttural tone, bidding his esquire explain himself without delay.

This Fitzgerald did, so much to the satisfaction of the fat lord, that he instantly rolled himself from his bed, bore down upon the Englishman, and seizing him in his arms, kissed him, hugged him, and called him his "valiant deliverer," whilst the esquire, despite the honour, struggled to release himself.

"Curse the fellow, Stephen, he'll stifle me," cried Fitzgerald.

"My dear friend, my worthy Fitzgerald, you shall be knighted if you succeed."

So saying, he released the esquire, who with crimson cheek and angry brow, silently smoothed his hair, while De Briffault, putting

on his shoes, prepared to follow Fitzgerald to his apartment, inspect the passage, and talk further about the feasibility of the project to sally and thence attack the enemy.

CHAPTER XIV.

DE BRIFFAULT rubbed his hands and uttered a great many exclamations, as Fitzgerald, taking chisel in hand, raised the plank, and then, thrusting his arm into the cavity, lifted the trap.

“Ugh! the cold air will be the death of me,” cried De Briffault, as the wind came rushing up from the vault.

Fitzgerald, lighting his torch, stood reverently by till the Lord of the Castle should please to descend. But De Briffault, looking

down on the square patch of darkness beneath him, applied one hand to where the small of his back should have been, the other to his stomach, then changing their position to one on each sleek side, shook his head, and said—

“*Diable !* I can’t get into that small, dark hole.”

Fitzgerald bowed gravely, and his friend Stephen smiling, turned away his head, each mentally agreeing with their chief’s remark.

“I must take your word about the passage, Fitzgerald, for it will be impossible for me to get through that infernally small and dark hole.”

“You will go down, Stanley,” said Fitzgerald, with a significant smile.

Stephen looked first into the hole and then at his velvet and satin, and said, making one of his best bows to his friend—

“I thank you, Master Thomas, but I must respectfully decline the favour.”

“Just as you please,” replied Fitzgerald.

De Briffault squatted himself down on the esquire’s hard bed, pulled open his doublet, and began fanning himself with his cap.

“*Mon brave*,” he said, “I shall now listen to the development of your plan.”

Fitzgerald, with Stephen’s assistance, detailed every portion of his scheme, and as he went on De Briffault smiled, fanned himself, grunted, and uttered, “Good;” “That is marvellous;” “Just so;” “Brave youth,” &c., &c.

When Fitzgerald had finished, Briffault remained silent for some time, as if in deep thought. At length he asked—

“But who is to take the command of this nocturnal expedition?”

“Whoever your lordship pleases,” returned Fitzgerald, bending his head.

“Then, *mon ami*,” replied his lordship, “you shall have the command. Your French is none of the best, but your noble heart and strong arm are both good. So you shall have the command of this important enterprise. May success attend your bravery.”

Fitzgerald’s countenance brightened as with a pleased smile he said—

“I will serve you with all my heart and all my strength.”

“Now, Stephen, my lad,” continued Fitzgerald, turning to his friend, “just ask him to lend me his signet ring, as a token, to show to those men I shall have to command, that I have his full authority for all I may desire to have done.”

Stephen, having made this French for his

friend, De Briffault, extending the fore finger of his fat right hand, which truth compels us to admit was not particularly clean, took therefrom a magnificent ring, heavy, massive, beautifully wrought and engraved. His arms were deeply cut on a gold shield, which shield was set in a frame-work of gold, diamonds, emeralds and rubies.

“Take it, Fitzgerald, and I hope it will not only be the means of your obtaining complete obedience from those you command, but will be a talisman to protect you from harm, and that you will bring it back a token of victory over my enemies.”

Fitzgerald bowed and took the signet ring, and fastened it to the riband of his mother's silver cross, which he always wore concealed in his breast.

Everything being thus far arranged, to the

entire satisfaction of De Briffault and his esquire, the former rose, with something like a grunt, to depart; but, having another question to ask Fitzgerald, again favoured the little bed with his ponderous person.

“Who, Fitzgerald,” he asked, “had better take the command of the other part of the expedition, which, at the fitting moment, when you give the signal, and De Liancourt’s men are in confusion, is to issue from the Castle?”

“Yourself, my lord, I think,” replied the young man respectfully.

“*Moi! moi! Diable!* What, leave my bed in the middle of the night! *Diable!* No, no; I will appoint any one you may select.”

This speech was delivered in French, and was quite incomprehensible, to Fitzgerald, who asked Stephen what it meant.

“Simply this. The Seigneur De Briffault declines the honour you suggest of commanding the force in person.”

De Briffault having roared and screamed his horror at his esquire's proposition, told him he thought he might as well do without turning the main body out at all.

“But, my lord, consider for a moment,” said Fitzgerald, quietly, “I shall only have about five-and-thirty or forty men for the passage,” then added aside, “What a cursed old, fat, cowardly frog he is!”

“What does he say?” asked De Briffault, who could make nothing out of his esquire's French-English jargon.

“Why, my lord,” replied Stephen, “he says he and his men would all be sent to the devil, without a force from the castle, and that to attempt it would be worse than use-

less. He declares he and his handful of men would only be able to wake up the wasps and get stung to death for their pains, if the main body did not issue from the castle when he gave the signal."

Stanley, however, omitted the last few words of his friend, namely, "What a cursed old, fat, cowardly frog he is." This was coolly said, and the "frog" had no idea how he was handled in the speech.

At length, however, the two Englishmen succeeded in persuading De Briffault of the necessity of a sortie.

"I think, Stephen, the best man to serve my purpose would be his cousin, the gallant old knight."

"Perhaps so," said Stephen thoughtfully. "But there will be some difficulty in persuading him to that."

“Why?”

“Because he is so jealous of the gallant old fellow.”

“What does Fitzgerald say?” asked the burly lord.

“He was saying that he thought your cousin would be the best man you could appoint to command the sortie.”

De Briffault grunted on hearing this proposition, and fidgetted and fumed for some time ere he decided on what course to pursue. At length, after a considerable silence, in which it occurred to him that anything was better than putting on cold armour—hard, stiff, unrelenting, barbarous armour, and clashing, full gallop, among swords, lances, maces, wounds and death, and so, scratching his ear with his little finger, he said—

“Stephen, my lad, go and seek my cousin and bring him here.”

“Be quick, Stephen, or perhaps our fat friend may alter his mind.”

Stephen hurried off, and in a very short time returned, ushering in a little, thin, old man, of a melancholy, dark visage, with large, soft, dark eyes, grey moustache, and long, grey hair. He was simply dressed, but wore a splendid sword, which he had obtained as a trophy in a hard fight, the only thing of which the good old knight was vain.

The worthy Chevalier De Briffault was a modest, valiant old warrior. He had been crossed in his affections in youth. He was a brave soldier—poor as he was brave, and now wearing out the remnant of his bachelor life in his fat, rich cousin’s castle. The fat,

rich cousin had owed him much, in many a hard pinch. The old chevalier had always come valiantly forward in the hour of need, served his kinsman, and humbly retired when his services ended, leaving the entire credit of his heroic deeds to his lazy relative.

“Ah!” began De Briffault, pouting his nether lip, half closing his heavy eyes, and doing the supercilious, whilst he rested his fat fist on his thigh, “we have some sharp work for you.”

“Well, cousin,” returned the knight, raising his clear dark eyes, which still retained a look of youth.

“He’s a fine old fellow, by George!” whispered Fitzgerald, as De Briffault pompously set forth what he needed, and the chevalier listened with a manly, quiet air, which the esquire prized.

“Aye, so he is, Master Thomas—the soul of Mars, in a grasshopper’s frame. As I went over the court in quest of him, I spied beautiful Marie, crossing the high bridge between the two turrets. High as it was, I saw the bouquet I gathered and she refused to take from me. She had placed it in her *corsage* with a considerable amount of care. Now to get that same bouquet she must have been at the pains to crawl under the table, where I tossed it, and she laughed at my rage. Upon my life, now I think about the matter, I feel certain she only refused it because her mother was nigh.”

“Perhaps so,” said Fitzgerald; “but just listen, and tell me how De Briffault and his cousin get on.”

Stephen obeyed.

Presently De Briffault, rising, gaped heavily,

saying, "he left the entire management of affairs in their hands, merely putting his veto on any sortie save the one specified."

Having said thus much he rolled off to his chamber, there to doze until supper time.

The valiant old knight and Fitzgerald, aided by Stephen's interpretations now and then, arranged all their plans, or rather, the worthy knight gave his entire concurrence and approbation to what the young esquire had so ably and so carefully designed.

"Now," said Fitzgerald, "I think we thoroughly understand each other."

"I believe so," said the old knight; "you are to attack the enemy to-morrow night."

"Exactly so," said Fitzgerald.

"And as soon as we see flames arise in the enemy's quarters, or hear three hearty cheers

from your men, we are instantly to leave the Castle and come to your assistance."

"Quite correct"

Stephen and the old knight then left the esquire to make his preparations for the coming fight.

Fitzgerald commenced his operations that very evening. The men, he determined, should not be made acquainted for what particular service they were destined; wherefore the esquire having fixed on those whom he would call, went to each man separately, bidding him repair to his chamber the following night a little before ten, showing De Briffault's signet ring as his authority, and enjoining the strictest silence.

Now each of the selected men, thinking himself the only one chosen for some secret expedition of importance, thought fit all the

following day to wear a grave and important brow, and though none spoke, each looked as though he could have spoken, and have told of some mighty deeds in prospective.

A black head piece and cuirass for each of the party, Fitzgerald, the old chevalier, and Stanley conveyed secretly to the esquire's chamber, and there the following night all the chosen men gathered at the appointed hour, marvelling much to meet so large a company.

When they were all assembled, Fitzgerald expounded, as well as he could, the purport of the meeting, and they all severally expressed their readiness, under Fitzgerald's command, to "conquer or die."

The Chevalier de Briffault swore each man on the cross hilt of his sword to secrecy as to the egress by which they were to go forth.

This done every soldier was provided with a cup of wine and something to eat; then the head pieces and cuirasses being duly fitted on, and each man armed with a pike, five of the number with torches, in addition to dark lanterns, whereby to light them at the night time, the trap was raised.

“Now, good Thomas Fitzgerald, fare-thee-well!” said Stephen; “success attend you, and spurs await you, as well as loads of glory! Fare-thee-well!”

“And fare-thee-well, too, Stephen,” replied his friend, taking his hand and pressing it warmly. “If I fall, remember my last thought will be of you, and gratitude for all your kindnesses. Remember, too, all the few worldly goods I leave will be yours.”

And again pressing his tried friend’s hand, he jumped into the vault.

“*Au revoir*, Fitzgerald,” exclaimed the valiant Chevalier de Briffault.

“*Oui, moshoo*,” replied the Englishman, and disappeared, giving the word for the rest to follow, which being done Stanley and the knight carefully shut down the trap and plank and left the place, whilst the expedition party, like moles, were threading the earth’s dark bowels.

The old knight then proceeded to give orders to arouse all the men in the vast castle with the command to arm and assemble in the immense court-yard. All his orders were silently complied with, and the lovely Marie’s black eyes were not opened from sleep by any din of arms or noise of men, and she lay peacefully dreaming of a dark young Englishman, who in her vision was whispering something very tenderly in her ear.

De Briffault, who had magnanimously refused to go to bed, was sleeping soundly in his chair, doing his utmost to make the rafters echo with his snores; in short, none were awake except those who were to take an active share in the exploits of the night.

The horses were brought forth, the men full armed and mounted, the old knight, with visor up, in a low voice, as he went through the ranks, explained what their service was to be, and Stephen Stanley, from the walls, watched eagerly for the signal.

The night was pitch dark; the moon had not risen. Stanley could hear no sound, could see no sight. No fires burnt in the camp, and none could have guessed so many men were near.

De Liancourt slept peacefully in his tent, little dreaming how soon and how roughly

that sleep would be broken. His son, too, a valiant young knight, reposed near him, wrapped in his cloak. The watch was set, and none dreamt of the few darkly armed men who were stealthily drawing near, to deal death and destruction among them.

Two hours had passed ere Stanley saw the first burst of flame. He made sure of the fact, and then instantly hurried down to make known that the signal had been duly given.

The red flames that shot up through the darkness of the night were raised by the secret party.

Fitzgerald and his little band had threaded the subterranean passage. Arrived at the end of it, and lighting a torch, the leader looked about for the opening among the rocks. That found, one by one he saw his men pass

through, telling them of the steep bank and deep stream beneath. All stood safely by the water's edge, save one, who, losing his footing, slipped, rolled, and splashed in the river.

"Help! help!" he cried; but a bright cuirass is no life-preserver in the water, and a stout-hearted man-at-arms sank to rise no more.

The party proceeded somewhat saddened by their comrade's sudden fate, and whispers were rife among them.

"Halt!" cried the leader, and instantly all stood still and silent.

"*Mes amis*," said Fitzgerald, haranguing his men in the best French he could manage; "hold your tongues, or return to the castle. Keep strict silence, or we shall be discovered. Let those who wish to speak return to the

castle as women and poltroons, but those who will remain quiet come with me, as men and warriors. Take your choice, my friends."

"We will keep silence to death or victory," was the unanimous response.

On they trudged in silence. A march of two hours brought them close to the enemy.

"Halt!" cried Fitzgerald, in a low voice, as they stood behind a hillock. "Remain here till I have reconnoitered."

"In half an hour at furthest," he said to himself, "we shall have the moonlight upon us. Now is our time, or never."

He approached the very edge of the camp. All was silent, save a distant click from the pike of some moving sentry, and the sound of grass torn up by the munching teeth of a couple of horses tethered close by.

Fitzgerald saw the white walls of the castle

through the gloom, but not a light was there visible. In his walk through the camp the day before, he had observed large quantities of hay and straw deposited beneath the waggons that served as barricades, and these were in the vicinity of De Liancourt's tent.

Returning to his men, he bade them march forward in perfect silence, and be in readiness to light the torches when he should give the word.

The five men bearing the torches walked first, and the whole party arrived, softly and undiscovered, over the smooth turf, to the barricading waggons.

"*Feu,*" whispered Fitzgerald, to the five torch bearers, and the torches were instantly lighted, and the esquire seizing one, fired the crisp straw.

Others following his example, the flames

arose fierce and red. Fitzgerald, bidding his men follow in close order, ran swiftly round to the opposite side of the camp, the torches being extinguished as soon as they had served his purpose.

“*Au feu ! au feu !*” resounded from the tents. Men shouted, and trumpets were blown ; the licking flames seized the canvas of the tents, and rose high in the air.

De Liancourt awakened, cursed, and hurried on his clothes.

As Fitzgerald had judged, all rushed towards the fire, whilst he and his men silently entered the camp.

“*Feu !*” said the esquire, and the torches were again lighted.

“*Battez comme des diables !*” shouted Fitzgerald, with all his might ; “De Briffault ! De Briffault ! curse them ; come on, my men.”

“De Briffault! De Briffault!” shouted the men, firing the tents, and rushing into the midst of the crowd.

“We are attacked!” roared De Liancourt; and his men echoed his words.

Fitzgerald’s men charged in among them in good order, with levelled pikes, shouting as Frenchmen will.

De Liancourt’s people, for the most part panic-stricken, tried to rush through the flames and escape.

“De Briffault! De Briffault!” cried the pike-men; and the flames roared, whilst they pressed their enemies back into the midst of them.

“Quarter! quarter!” now became the cry from De Liancourt’s men, only answered by another, more exultant, of “De Briffault! De Briffault!”

“Stand !” roared young De Liancourt, waving a mace, and vainly trying to establish some degree of order. “Face about, and drive back the enemy !”

A small body of men rallied round the young hero, whilst the greater part were saddling horses, in all haste, thereon to fly the faster.

De Liancourt, himself, seizing his sword, joined his son, with a party he had succeeded in calming. Thus united, they faced about on Fitzgerald and his men, and fought with desperation, hand to hand.

“De Liancourt ! De Liancourt !” was now heard mingling, with “De Briffault !”

At these sounds, the valiant fugitives pricked up their ears. “De Liancourt ! De Liancourt !” they also cried, and dashed helter-skelter on the foe.

Fitzgerald and his little party were sur-

rounded on all sides, and fought hand to hand among the roaring flames. Twelve of their number were already slain, whilst more than double that number of their enemies bit the earth.

“Courage, my lads!” cried the esquire; “hold out, the Chevalier de Briffault will be here in a few minutes!”

There was encouragement in his tone; but his words, true British, went for nought. The enemy pressed on every side; the pikes were useless; they were compelled to fight with their swords.

Fitzgerald dealt death on all sides, but the battle was unequal. His men were cut down one after the other; three or four of the enemy at once setting on each of them.

The sound of the trampling of horses was a welcome one.

“Charge !” was heard, shouted in the old knight’s voice.

The fire had utterly destroyed tents and waggons. The horses dashed on, and leapt the burning embers. The long lances, firmly rested, did their work.

“De Briffault ! De Briffault !” now predominated over “De Liancourt ! De Liancourt !”

De Liancourt, raging like a savage tiger, made front to horses and lances. With glaring eyes and foaming mouth, he dashed instantly at one of the foremost horsemen, seized him by the leg, and endeavoured to grapple with him. The man, shortening his lance, raised his arm above his head as his horse reared up ; then, striking down, buried the long, glittering spear-head in De Liancourt’s wrathful breast. He relaxed his grasp with a loud

yell, and, reeling back, fell on the burning embers, where, after writhing for a minute in horrible convulsions, he breathed his last.

Fitzgerald, seeing that the victory must of necessity be their own, now sought to do some deed to brighten his fame.

Young De Liancourt fought with great courage, but with the courage of despair.

“Surrender! *donnez vous up!*” cried the esquire, rushing towards him.

“I will not surrender. Come on!” rejoined the young, hawk-eyed noble, aiming what he intended should be, a deadly blow at the valiant Fitzgerald.

“Look out there, young fellow,” cried the esquire, parrying the blow and tearing off his head-piece and cuirass, perceiving that his adversary was completely unarmed, with the exception of his sword.

“ Now, *Mooshoor*, come on.”

The two were well matched, and each took pleasure in the other's skill—if it could be called pleasure under the circumstances of its being a fight for life or death—and it was requisite that each should put forth his utmost science in the use of his weapon. In that, too, they were equal, but it soon became apparent that the advantage of coolness was on Fitzgerald's side.

De Liancourt fought with ardour, and with all the heat of his soul. The Englishman, both cool and collected, could see good hits to be made, which were completely lost to the other in his excitement and ungovernable fury.

The young Frenchman's brows were knit till they nearly met ; his parted lips showed his white teeth firmly set beneath his black

moustache, and the moon, now high in the heavens, gave an added whiteness to his pale face, whilst the gallant youth's eyes flashed like lightning on his enemy.

Fitzgerald's brows were not contracted, nor were his lips parted ; they were firmly compressed together. The perspiration ran down his forehead in drops as large as peas, and on to his crimsoned cheeks, but his calm blue eyes were steadily, and without the slightest passion, fixed on his adversary.

The combat lasted a considerable time, and De Liancourt could not help perceiving that his adversary was rapidly gaining ground. The more the Englishman coolly conquered, the more the fiery Frenchman raged and lost command over himself. His breath became thick and more panting, his face more deadly pale.

A smile passed over Fitzgerald's face.

"I will give you your life," said the esquire, leaning on his sword and wiping the perspiration from his head and face with the back of his strong hand.

"I neither ask, nor will I accept it," said De Liancourt, rushing at the esquire with all his strength.

"Very well, Mooshoo Frog," said Fitzgerald, preparing his guard; and again the fight commenced with greater fury.

They fought in a space left clear by both parties, and dealt their blows without the slightest interruption.

Fitzgerald was convinced that he had to deal with a man almost mad with rage. The angry blood of a long line of the De Liancourts seemed to fill the veins of the young man with whom he was contending. He

sought only to slay the Englishman, and each blow, calmly parried, caused him to gnash his teeth, and roar like an infuriated mad beast. He pressed hard on Fitzgerald, dealt blow after blow, but not one reached him.

“*Donnez up,*” cried the esquire, “or I must kill you.”

“Never, you infernal Englishman,” was the reply, in furious tones, accompanied by a shower of blows.

Fitzgerald parried them, and seeing that his kindly intentions were all thrown away, pressed suddenly on his antagonist, and sheathed his sword in his throat. The point passed in at the side, just above the collar bone, and was followed by the gradually widening blade, till the guard knocked against the neck. It passed obliquely upwards, coming out beneath the ear on the opposite side.

Fitzgerald withdrew his sword. The young knight's blood covered him. He bade two of De Briffault's men, who had watched the termination of the fight, convey the body to the Castle, and wiping his sword, turned to other deeds.

CHAPTER XV.

FITZGERALD, looking around, beheld De Liancourt's conquered men taking to their heels in every direction. He instantly prepared to pursue the panic-stricken fugitives.

As he seized a masterless steed by the bridle and prepared to mount, the horse, starting on one side, put his foot on the face of a body in full armour, except the head-piece, which lay on the ground close by the prostrate form.

A faint groan escaped from the body, the arm was raised for an instant, and then falling heavily, a second groan was heard, and all was still.

Fitzgerald, mastering the horse, stooped to inspect the body. The form was small and slight. The young Englishman's fears were realised; it was that of the poor old Chevalier de Briffault.

The valiant old knight had well headed his men, and charged with all the vigour of his more youthful days. When the elder De Liancourt fell, several of his people, seeing it, surrounded the knight's horse, calling on others to aid them. De Briffault's men hastened to defend their leader, and the combatants fought fiercely for a quarter of an hour, until the Chevalier de Briffault was dragged from his steed, his head-piece and

breastplate rudely pulled off, and many a sword was plunged into his aged, courageous breast.

“He was a good man and a valiant knight,” thought Fitzgerald. “Poor old fellow ; he died like a man, his face to the enemy, and his armour on his back. By George ! I trust my death may be like his.”

Mounting his horse, Fitzgerald joined his men and gave chase with the rest. De Liancourt’s horses had fled in the confusion, and spread themselves abroad, so that their flying masters had but their legs to trust to, and they were useless.

Fitzgerald found De Briffault’s people cutting down their enemies, and spearing them with a remorseless, savage ferocity. In vain he shouted and bade them give quarter to such as would accept it. He forebore to slay his

miserable foes, seeing that his men had slain too many already. They had encircled the fugitives, and then closing, drove the enemy in the middle, and there made an end of them at their ease, so that but a very few were left.

Fitzgerald, disgusted at this ferocity of his followers, stood apart.

“What a pack of blood-thirsty brutes,” he said to himself. “They are cutting down the poor helpless frogs in cold blood. Well! thank Heaven I’m an Englishman.”

He determined to make a further effort to save some of his enemies, therefore, galloping into the midst of the slayers, he roared out to them—

“Give quarter! You have had blood and revenge enough. I will slay the first man that strikes another blow.”

“Down with the Englishman !” cried a voice, but no one came forward.

“Whose voice was that ?” enquired the esquire. “Let him come forward and face me.”

There was not the slightest anger in Fitzgerald’s voice ; and he looked calmly about him.

No one answered, but one of them struck at one of De Liancourt’s wounded and helpless men. The young Englishman with one blow, dashed him, stunned, from his saddle. Then remembering De Briffault’s signet ring, he drew it from his breast, and holding it, glittering aloft in the moonlight, he bade them obey his orders, or, if they disobeyed, to take the consequences.

“Who are you that you tell us to obey ?” cried one of the men riding up to him, and

putting his grinning face close to that of Fitzgerald.

“I command you in the name of your master and my own,” said the Englishman, favouring him with a well applied blow in the face, which completely terminated the existence of the impudent grin. Then calling to the rest, he said—

“Get into rank, I command you, in the name of the Lord de Briffault!” and pushing those near him into some form, and still calling on De Briffault’s name, he at length succeeded in getting them into something like order.

Riding to the front, he proceeded to develop what was next to be done, which the men took to be De Briffault’s commands, though, in truth, it was but Fitzgerald’s own plan, and quite unknown to the fat lord, and which

he intended to fully carry out should the victory prove, as it had already done, his.

The Englishman well knew the amount of De Liancourt's force, and perceived that they had all been brought into the field, the two seigneurs having no enemies to guard against but each other. His purpose was, therefore, to march directly and take possession of De Liancourt's stronghold.

Dividing the force before him, he sent one party back to the Castle with intelligence of his departure and news of the victory, and proceeded with the other, to put in execution his project.

The Frenchmen's excited thirst for blood having cooled down, they followed the silent esquire, talking, laughing, and singing, in honour of their victory.

Fitzgerald rode in front of his men, his

head uncovered, pondering on the events of the past fight, and his future knighthood. Then he wondered what his life was to be, and how, penniless and friendless, he was to make his way.

“It can only be done,” thought he, “by means of sword and shield. I’ve none of my friend Stephen’s clever ways and cunning devices, and above all, I must beware of love till a riper age. It has marred me once, and may again if I am not cautious.

He began to think of Bertha Bruce and the scene in the chapel ; Lord William, his dead father, his lost Tower and its belongings, and many other matters.

The morning sun had risen red, and a cool fresh breeze was blowing. The birds, too, had begun their chirping songs, and the cattle were being driven to the fields before

the party reached the De Liancourt stronghold.

When Fitzgerald, from rising ground, perceived its towers in the wide plain beneath him, he halted and commanded his followers to keep perfect silence ; then resuming their march they descended the hill ; another mile brought them in front of the Castle.

Fitzgerald, like a prudent man, had taken the precaution of carrying a prisoner with him, which prisoner, perched behind one of the men, sang, and laughed and talked with his captors, as merrily and unconcernedly as the very best of them.

The castle gate was shut, the drawbridge up, a military figure stood shading his eyes with his hands from the bright rays of the sun. He was evidently watching the advancing party. He stood on the battlements

over the gateway, puzzled as to what they did there, and bethinking him it might, perchance, be some men sent by De Liancourt from his camp.

Having halted his troop, Fitzgerald, with the man a prisoner, and one other, trotted up to the gate. Having arrived there, the esquire bade the man explain to the figure on the battlement that it was required the Castle should be given into De Briffault's hands, as the rightful lord and his son were both dead, and that the greater part of their force had also been slain.

This the man on the battlements pronounced to be a lying trap got up to cheat him into letting them into his master's Castle, and, as a matter of course, he stoutly refused to do so.

Fitzgerald, finding his man's explanation

discredited, produced the prisoner, who leered and nodded in the most familiar manner; the other opened his eyes.

“Is that you, Paul?” he cried; “is it really true what I have heard?”

“Yes, quite true,” replied the prisoner, proceeding to tell him they had not “a leg to stand upon,” and advising the immediate surrender of the castle, adding, doubtless for the information of his captors, that a castle, however strong, when held by only five defenders and with no very large stock of provisions, a large portion having been sent to the camp, was not a very tenable place.

By this time four other men appeared, and there stood the garrison of the castle all of a row. They held a council together for some minutes, and then Jean declared that he must go and consult his young mistress, the

Démoiselle Isabelle De Liancourt. He departed on his errand, leaving his comrades to talk and laugh with the new arrivals, which they did to their heart's content.

Now, it so happened that the demoiselle had only just arisen ; and little dreaming of what had befallen her father and only brother, was at that time gently drawing back a heavy crimson brocaded curtain, which divided her bedroom from the next, and into that next, which was both dark and quiet, she silently entered.

It was a very large apartment, with a window, across which was hooked a dark curtain, reaching very nearly to the top ; but sufficient of the window was left uncovered to allow divers armorial bearings of rich colours to be reflected by the morning sun on the oaken floor. A lamp was struggling in the

bright beams, flickering, and about to die out.

Isabelle walked softly towards a large bed, with rich velvet covering, and with great gentleness parted the curtains, and looked anxiously within. The pale, delicate face she there beheld had an expression of much pain. The thin lips were dry and parted, shewing the white teeth ; the fine nostrils were somewhat dilated ; the eyes were partly closed and the black, arched eye-brows much contracted.

“Thank God ! she sleeps !” said Isabelle, and she sat down in a huge carved chair, to await till her mother should awaken.

An attendant, who had watched through a part of the night, was also in a profound sleep, and Isabelle, who had had but three hours, rest, felt her head declining, some portion of

her anxiety being removed by her dear mother's sleep.

She had only been a few minutes seated when a very gentle tap sufficed to arouse her. She instantly crossed the room to the door, and quietly opened it, and before her stood her own rosy-cheeked, handsome little page.

In a soft undertone, the little fellow gently, and with great respect and interest, enquired how the Dame De Liancourt had passed the night, and how she then was.

In a kind, gentle manner, Isabelle said—

“My mother has had a better night than was expected, and she is now sleeping peacefully. But, my boy, what has brought you here thus early in the morning?”

“One of the men-at-arms,” replied the rosy-cheeked page, “wishes to speak to you for a minute.”

“Wishes to speak to me! What does he want to say to me?”

“He did not tell me.”

Isabelle gently closed the door and followed the page to an ante-room, where stood our friend, the watcher of the gateway.

After bowing and scraping, and coughing once or twice to clear his throat, and bowing once more, he said, most kindly, as well as most respectfully—

“Most noble lady,” and again he hemmed and was silent.

Isabelle De Liancourt, in a kind and encouraging manner, told him to proceed, and the rosy-cheeked page ventured to suggest in his calm, silvery voice—

“Courage, Jean! My mistress is both kind and good.”

Taking courage from these words of the

rosy-cheeked child—for he was little more than a child in years—Jean coughed again, but this time with his hand before his mouth, shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and stood with half closed eyes—the very picture of grief—and in an exceedingly dolorous manner, said, in a somewhat hesitating tone—

“Most noble lady, news has come from your father’s camp.”

“Where is the messenger?” asked Isabelle, with a voice and manner not at all encouraging to Jean.

“He is outside the castle wall,” replied the man, hesitating.

“Outside the walls?”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Why do you hesitate to tell me what is the matter?”

“Because—because—”

“Because,” repeated Isabelle, “it is bad news. Is it not so?”

Jean drooped his shaggy head, cast down his eyes, and said—

“Alas! alas!—” and again hesitated.

Isabelle felt her heart beat, and said—

“Is my brother safe?”

“Our men have all been routed,” was the reply; “and that English rascal of a squire, in the service of the Seigneur de Briffault, that same your ladyship knows so well by name, is at the gate, and says we must surrender.”

“Surrender!” Isabelle repeated.

“Must surrender, my lady.”

“Must!” said Isabelle, in an indignant tone of voice.

“Yes, my lady.”

“But, Jean, we will not comply with the

insolent demand. My father and my brother will not be long ere they come to our help."

Jean looked puzzled, grew very red in the face, as he replied—

"They cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"Because they—they—"

"Are slain," said Isabelle, as the man bowed his head.

Now it happened that Isabelle de Liancourt's father was an exceedingly harsh, overbearing, tyrannical man, in no wise given to tender affection; neither did he show the slightest love or care for his daughter, nor even noticed her, save to exact the most feudal respect and ceremony.

Consequently, if she felt an awe and respect for him, no soft, womanly fondness was ex-

perienced. He had never in her recollection shown the slightest fatherly affection, he had never entered into her childish joys or her more youthful wishes. He had never, in truth, called forth her love, and though the germ was in her, the true feeling never came to maturity.

But despite this want of fatherly interest and the love that should have subsisted between them, she had from earliest infancy, or rather as soon as she was capable of reflection, thought of him as of one exposed to the casualty of war and its dangers.

Taking all these matters into consideration it may readily be imagined that she could not feel the overwhelming, heartbreaking sorrow which would in most other instances have been the case, on the announcement of a

father's death. Still a pang shot through her heart, her tears could not be restrained, and she wept very bitterly.

Her brother's loss, however, called forth her greatest grief. He was wild, and fierce, and hot-headed, it must be confessed ; but he and his sister loved each other dearly, and his youth had seemed to her a protection against death.

Isabelle wept unrestrainedly, and her rosy-cheeked page stood silently by. As for poor Jean, he was completely at a loss to know what to do, or what to say. He was doubtful whether he should remain or whether he should go, whether he should speak or whether he should be mute ; and in this way half-an-hour or more passed, and then Isabelle endeavoured to stifle her sorrow.

She remembered, too, that she was the sole

surviving De Liancourt capable of action, for her dear mother was too ill and too weak to do anything; it behoved her, therefore, to rouse herself, and come to some decision touching the surrender of the castle.

Never before having been called upon to decide in an important emergency, and having for the first time to begin in sorrow and fear, her spirit somewhat sank within her, as she said—

“Jean, what must we do?”

“Why, my lady,” returned Jean, “I know not what to advise.”

“My father and brother, you tell me, have both been slain?”

“Alas! that is too true.”

“And our garrison reduced to less than half-a-dozen men?”

“True again, my lady, and—”

Jean made a pause.

“ And what, Jean ? ”

“ Our stock of provisions is very reduced,” replied Jean.

“ Then I see nothing we can do but to submit with a good grace.”

“ Or go through a regular besieging and starving out,” replied Jean.

“ And if we submit, Jean, what will be the consequences ? ” asked Isabelle, in a somewhat tremulous voice.

Jean having broken the ice, gained courage as he went on, and spoke more freely and to the purpose.

“ Why, noble lady, the Seigneur de Briffault’s force is under the walls, and that vile Englishman, who commands in the name of De Briffault, his master, would take possession ; and, as a matter of course, you, and my

lady, your mother, and all of us, would be at his mercy."

Isabelle's heart sunk within her, for she was too well aware of the bitter hate De Briffault entertained for the De Liancourts and their household—a hate which had been handed down to him through the blood of several generations.

"What can we do?" Isabelle asked, in a despairing voice.

"Let the Englishman at once into the Castle," replied Jean.

"What then?"

"Why then, my lady, you would perhaps be able to make milder terms with him than if he has to wait till he has starved us all."

"Then you had better return to the battlements, for I plainly see your advice is good," said Isabelle.

“Don’t you think, my lady, it would be as well if you went to the battlements, and—”
Jean hesitated.

“And what?”

“Spoke to the Englishman.”

“For what purpose?”

“To judge for yourself what sort of man he is.”

“No, I see no advantage to be gained. It would be better that you conduct him to my apartment.”

“As you please, my lady.”

Jean bowed and left the room, well pleased that his advice had been taken. On reaching the gate, he found his four comrades in the same spot where he had left them, talking and laughing with such of the enemy as stood beneath them, the rest being drawn up at some little distance from the Castle.

Fitzgerald, as soon as he saw Jean approach the wall, addressed him.

“Well, my man,” he asked, looking up, “what reply do you bring from the daughter of De Liancourt?”

“Well, she desires me to say—that is, to tell you—” and Jean paused, scarcely knowing what to say.

“To tell me what?” asked Fitzgerald, with a tinge of impatience.

“That she desires to have some conversation with you before surrendering her father’s Castle,” replied Jean.

“Open the gate, and I will instantly comply with her wishes.”

“Not so fast, Mr. Englishman. I do not intend to open the gate till terms have been fully agreed upon between you and the Lady Isabelle de Liancourt.”

“Do as you please. Where am I to meet the young lady?”

“In her ladyship’s room.”

“How am I to get there, if you do not let me through the gate?” asked the esquire, with a smile.

“By coming up this rope-ladder,” said Jean, lowering one.

Fitzgerald, as soon as the ladder reached the ground, called to one of his followers, to whose sagacity and care he could trust the command of his men during his absence, and ascended the wall of De Liancourt’s stronghold.

Fitzgerald, as we have before remarked, was good-looking and comely; but at this moment his comeliness was somewhat obscured by heat and dust, and travel; being conscious of which, and being an observer of

the decorum of life, he refused to appear before the Lady Isabelle de Liancourt until he should have removed his disfigurements and demanded to be supplied with water and other requisites.

Isabelle, during the esquire's somewhat long absence, remained dreading his arrival. She had been made to look upon the English people as a race of barbarians and cut-throats, and upon De Briffault's esquire as one of the very worst savages of them all.

As imagination will turn painter, and draw sometimes very fanciful portraits, even without the originals, so Isabelle de Liancourt trembled as hers presented to the mind the picture of a huge species of Gog, with flowing red hair, outrageously ferocious lineaments, the voice of a stentor, and with manners more resembling a bear than a human being.

Her imaginative portrait was scarcely completed when the door opened and Jean entered, followed by Fitzgerald. Isabelle looked quickly at him as we would at some horrid spectre we had been nerving ourselves to encounter, and great was her surprise when she beheld him as unlike the portrait her imagination had sketched as it was possible to be. His upright, noble figure, his fresh, fair complexion, his curling hair, his quiet, self-possessed, good-natured expression, were all greatly in his favour, and Isabelle at once felt that she might place implicit confidence in him; but, as she thought this, she said to herself—

“Surely this is not the English monster.”

Jean’s introduction, however, told her it was the English monster.

Fitzgerald bowed with the greatest respect,

and stood before her silent, until it was her pleasure to speak.

Merely intent on the successfully carrying out his enterprise, Fitzgerald had not given a moment's thought to what the lady of the Castle might be like ; besides, he had formed a habit of thinking about ladies as little as possible, and looking at them still less. Now, however, he cast his eyes on Isabelle de Liancourt more than once ; in fact, the truth may as well be told, more than a dozen times.

The Lady Isabelle was well favoured, and what is more, there was something in her whole demeanour that pleased the squire more than words can tell. It was not her soft, white and pink complexion, nor her black hair, nor her tender blue eyes, nor her pretty features, nor her small, round figure, nor her delicate white hand, nor her magnificent dress,

it was not one alone of these, nor all that pleased him; but her whole bearing that spread a tender feeling over him, and caused him at length to give up his intermittent glances, and fix his eyes full upon her.

The Lady Isabelle looked up and spoke, and Fitzgerald, starting as if taken by surprise, drew himself up, with a red face and an air of soldierly "attention." At the same time this thought passed like lightning through his mind—

"I would to heaven I had not killed her brother."

"Jean, my man-at-arms," said Isabelle, in a pleasing tone, "has told me that in the name of De Briffault you demand the surrender of my father's Castle."

"Yes," was the laconic reply; but though

the word was short, his eyes said plainly enough, "I pity you with all my heart."

That look, very different from what she had expected, gave Isabelle courage, though her throat still swelled, and tears came into her eyes, but by a great effort she suppressed them. Fitzgerald saw the working of her throat and, turning half away, said—

"Weep not, lady; no evil is intended you. I am not here as an enemy, but, believe me, as a friend."

The young girl felt that his words were to be relied on, and with true French ardour, thanked him and extended her hand, which he took, and, having taken, knew not what to do with it.

Such a hand as that had never before touched his, and, as it lay in his palm, it felt so small, so soft, trembled with such a deli-

cate tremor, he dared not close his upon it. Her look at the same time was so imploring and sad, that Fitzgerald's heart gave a stout thump at his ribs, as he said, her hand remaining still in his.

"Lady, fear nothing, I will defend you to the last drop of my blood. By Heaven! I will," and irresistibly his strong fingers closed on the little white hand, and the next instant it was gone, leaving only its impression behind.

In spite of Fitzgerald's bad French, Isabelle de Liancourt found no great difficulty in understanding him, and in coming to amicable terms for the surrender of the Castle. How he managed to make himself understood we cannot comprehend, for hitherto no affair could he bring to a final close without the aid of his friend Stephen Stanley. Now,

however, he understood all that was propounded by the maiden, and made himself equally understood in his turn.

“Well, lady,” he said, “it is quite impossible that the Castle can be held for any length of time with the few men you have and the scarcity of provisions. My advice is to surrender at once.”

“And that *you* take immediate possession,” she replied, laying strong emphasis on “*you*.”

“Am I correct?”

“Yes,” he returned, with a pleasant smile ;

“and I pledge you my honour, as a man and an Englishman, that I will guard you from all danger.”

“Then I will do everything you desire, for I feel I can trust you implicitly,” she replied, with a smile of confidence.

“If any one dares to offer the slightest

affront to you, or to touch a hair of your head, I will resent it. Depend entirely on me."

"To your honour and guardianship I place myself and my people."

Fitzgerald's face beamed with a degree of animation and pleasure such as had never shone on it before, and, bowing respectfully, he and Jean left the room, and returned to the Castle gate ; whilst Isabelle retired to her own room, much marvelling why Englishmen and brute were not synonymous, and feeling the greatest confidence in Fitzgerald's honour and truthfulness—both of which were doubtless inspired by his manly, open manners, honest face, and straightforward conduct.

The thoughts of the daughter of De Liancourt were sad, and as regarded her fate,

all looked dark and misty. Poor girl ! she had none to whom she could communicate her thoughts. Her mother slept on.

Isabelle, as she looked from the Castle keep and saw De Briffault's men, felt the greatest gratitude towards the Englishman for the quiet manner in which they entered, so quiet that her mother slept on undisturbed : Fitzgerald had taken care that it should be so.

Not a word was spoken by the men. They had dismounted and led in their horses : Fitzgerald placed the guard where it was requisite, the others being ordered to take rest, which, after their fatigue, they required.

Fitzgerald, having sent off a messenger to inform De Briffault that he had taken possession of De Liancourt's castle, seated himself

in an arm chair, and was not long ensconced there before he fell asleep, dreaming he held in his the little white hand of Isabelle de Liancourt.

CHAPTER XVI.

It might have been fear, or anger, or anxiety, or the heat of the weather, acting on constant good living, but from one or more of these causes, the very morning after the fight the corpulent De Briffault was sent to his bed by his formidable enemy the gout. At that time medical knowledge was not first-rate, and the profession was generally represented by one in the joint capacity of barber and leech; so from the badness of the medicine and the

want of skill in the treatment, the fat old knight was tormented, and groaned and lamented unrelieved, although numerous remedies were resorted to.

Towards evening it happened that Fitzgerald's messenger arrived at the Castle, and having spoken to the Lady De Briffault, she, in great haste, conducted him to her gouty lord; whilst Marie, left at liberty, descended to her own garden; a green retreat, shaded with tufted trees and shrubs, laid out within the Castle walls.

Stephen Stanley, always on the watch, had seen the lady of the Castle depart with the messenger his friend the esquire had sent, as well as Marie's descent to her garden, and he began to argue the point with himself, whether he should go to De Briffault's room, or whether he should seize the opportunity of

meeting his “beautiful Marie” in the garden, and hear her sing a gay French air. He chose the latter.

Marie was sitting listlessly by a small fountain, her eyes fixed on the water, whilst her ears were intent on a stealthy step, which she pretended not to hear, even though it drew nearer and nearer. At length, a handsome young man rushed to her side, designing, no doubt, to alarm the maiden dreadfully, which she, with an apparently frightened air, allowed him to imagine he had done.

The handsome youth, of course, was Stephen Stanley, who said —

“I fear I frightened you, Marie,” and he sat down by her side.

The young lady made no reply, and after a rapid interchange of glances and smiles, commenced singing her merry French air, adding

to her recreation by throwing small pebbles into the water, and this continued till she had sang through every verse of her ditty; Stephen, in the meantime, leaning his hands on his sword-hilt, and his head on his hands, looked at her with a thoroughly gratified and pleased smile, and an equally tender manner.

When the song was finished, they both remained mute for a few minutes, and Stephen put on as serious a demeanour as he was able.

“ Marie, I have something to tell you,” he at length began.

“ What is it ? ”

“ Something very important.”

“ Indeed ! ”

“ Yes ; about yourself.”

“ About me ? ”

And throwing a pebble which she held in

her hand into the water, she looked anxiously into the serious face of Master Stephen.

“How grave you look, Monsieur Stanley; your smiles have all vanished. What have you to say?” she asked.

Marie’s impression was that she was about to listen to some tender avowal, so she stooped her head, and taking up another pebble cast it into the water.

Stephen smiled, but instantly strained his face to gravity.

“The Seigneur de Briffault has desired me to speak—”

“Speak,” said Marie, repeating his last word; “but whatever my father has desired you to tell me say it merrily, for just now you positively look more like an old friar than Stephen Stanley, so go on.”

“I look grave, Marie, because I am about

to speak on a grave subject—a very grave subject.”

“ I should like to hear you speak on a grave subject,” said the damsel turning towards him.

“ He is not going to speak of love, that is certain,” Marie thought.

She put on a listening face. Stephen began to laugh, and in his turn threw a pebble into the water.

“ Now, Mr. Gravity, what are you laughing at?”

“ What am I laughing at?”

“ Yes, what are you laughing at?” she said, her face still assuming a listening, if not anxious, air.

“ I laugh, beautiful Marie,” he said, “ because you look so very grave, just like an old nun.”

“Because I am to hear a grave matter ; so do, dear Monsieur Stanley, let me hear it without delay.”

“Well then,” he began, “your father considering it expedient to provide an alliance for you—”

“An alliance for me !”

“Yes, and what’s more he has selected a husband worthy of you.”

Marie reddened, looked up at Stephen, who paused for a moment.

“Go on,” she said.

“He has charged me to bear these glad tidings to you, and to bid you be in readiness to do his will.”

By this time Marie’s face was hidden in her hands, and she began to weep as children will when it is revealed to them that their best doll has been accidentally destroyed.

Stephen smiled, and indeed if the truth must be told, his smile verged on laughter, but he instantly smoothed his countenance to gravity and said—

“Why do you weep?”

“Because—because—”

“Because—because—you weep at that which most damsels rejoice! Your future husband loves you—”

“I don’t want his love!”

“Loves you,” continued Stephen, not heeding her interruption, “with a most ardent passion. He is young—he is—”

“I don’t care what he is, Stephen. I hate him!” she cried.

“What, without knowing who he is?” said Stephen, with a smile.

“Oh! I know well enough. It is that odious Chevalier de Berrier! I will never

marry him. I hate him. I will never marry at all, Stephen," and her tears redoubled, and with them Stanley's smiles.

"The Chevalier de Berrier, remember, Marie, is a valorous young knight. He is handsome, rich, and ladies esteem a smile from him a treasure."

"Then let them have his smiles," cried Marie, with asperity.

"He is courteous," went on Stephen, "and noble. Do you despise all this?"

"Yes."

"Is he not all I say?"

"What you say," replied Marie, from behind her hands, "may be true—it is true, but I cannot endure the sight of him. He has tormented me this year past, the horrible knight that he is!"

"And will you say all this to your father, Marie?"

“Yes, that I will and much more, Monsieur Stanley. I would a thousand times rather be an ugly nun, dressed in a coarse black dress, and never have a lover, never be married at all,” and here her tears began to flow more copiously than ever.

Stephen looked at her silently for awhile, and then gently putting his hand upon her arm, and stooping his head, whispered softly in her ear.

“Suppose, my beautiful Marie, that one Stephen Stanley, an Englishman, without either renown or worldly goods, were to say to you for himself, instead of for another, what you have just listened to, would you weep and hate him, and wish to be an ugly old nun in a coarse black dress? or would you put on a smile and a blush, and say, ‘Dear Stephen, I will be thine for ever and ever?’”

Marie did look up, and smiled and blushed, and said—

“Dearest Stephen, I will be thine for ever and ever.”

“And so you shall, my beautiful Marie, and death only shall part us.”

And here Stephen kissed her forehead and then her hand, and was about to repeat the kisses; but she drew away her hand, and said—

“Stephen, are you serious?”

“To be sure I am.”

“What will my father say, when he knows that—”

“I am serious,” laughed the young man. “Why he knows it already.”

“Now don’t laugh, Stephen, for until you get my father’s consent—”

“I have it already.”

“Then all that you have been telling me about De Berrier—”

“I said nothing to you about De Berrier ; it was about myself, only you would misunderstand me.”

“And you have really obtained my father’s consent to—to—”

“Marry you ! yes. I rather think, dearest girl that—that—”

“What ?” asked Marie.

“That he had an idea you did not hate me. So he asked me one day if I loved you.”

“And what did you say ?”

“I told *him* what *you* must have guessed long ago, that I adored you,” said the youth.

“What further was said ?”

“Your father, like a dear good father that he is, told me he loved you tenderly and wished to ensure your happiness, and desired

me to speak to you myself. Will you pardon me my manner of doing so?"

"Do you deserve pardon?"

"Yes."

"Upon my word, Stephen," she replied with a loving smile, "you are the most conceited, story-telling ape that ever trod on French ground, and—"

It is, however, no use going on with lovers' conversations. It will be sufficient for our purpose to relate that they returned to the Castle by moonlight, and that same night received the blessing of De Briffault and his dame as affianced lovers, and most happy they both felt.

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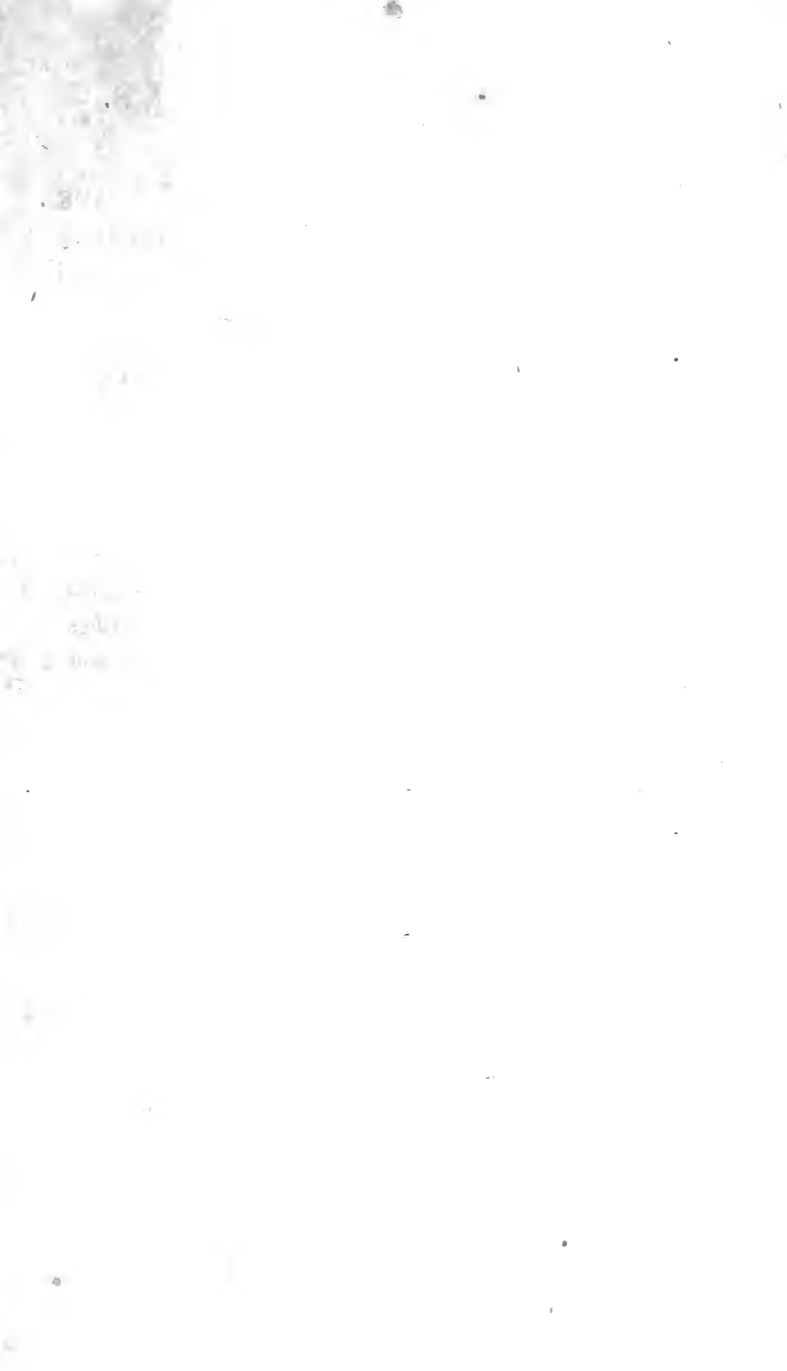
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